

National Capital Authority

RG Menzies Walk

Consultation Report

February 2008

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Introduction

This report outlines the process and outcomes of consultations in relation to the reconstruction of the RG Menzies Walk. The consultation program was conducted by the National Capital Authority (NCA) during November and December 2007.

RG Menzies Walk

The RG Menzies Walk is a public pathway along the north shore of the central basin of Lake Burley Griffin, traversing Commonwealth Park, Rond Terraces and Kings Park (the Canberra Central Parklands). The Walk commemorates Prime Minister Robert Menzies (first term 1939-41, second term 1949-66). It was officially opened and named by Prime Minister Howard in February 2006. Four commemorative plaques along the route were unveiled at the time to explain the significance of the Menzies era to the development of Canberra and its landscape.

It was recognised however that the existing gravel path which forms the RG Menzies Walk would require reconstruction over time in order to provide a continuous, fully accessible promenade from Commonwealth Avenue bridge to Kings Avenue bridge.

The RG Menzies Walk reconstruction is the first project in a staged program of works under the Canberra Central Parklands Master Plan. The master plan is currently being prepared by the winner of the 2007 Canberra Central Parklands Competition, Oxigen Landscape Architects. Draft designs for the RG Menzies Walk were prepared by Oxigen in conjunction with the NCA.

The project involves the construction of a 4.5 metre wide promenade, including varied edge treatments, new boardwalks, breakout spaces, and associated landscape works. The promenade will provide an attractive and appropriate surface catering for shared use by pedestrians, as well as runners, cyclists, and emergency vehicles.

Consultation Methods

Consultation regarding the proposed design of the RG Menzies Walk commenced in November 2007. Presentation boards showing the proposed designs for the Walk and the also the development of the Canberra Central Parklands Master Plan, were displayed at the National Capital Exhibition in Commonwealth Park. Four forms of consultation were employed during this stage of the project, with public comment and feedback provided through:

- 11 individual consultations with key user groups/individuals
- 1 stakeholder forum and 2 public forums
- 49 online responses to a survey and public comment submission form
- 14 hardcopy responses to a survey and public comment submission form

Individual Consultations

A series of preliminary stakeholder consultations with 11 interest and community groups and individuals were conducted. Detailed outcomes were separately recorded.

Stakeholder and Public Forums

Public notices inviting comment on the RG Menzies Walk were placed on the NCA website from mid November and the Canberra Times from Saturday 17 November 2007. A media release issued on 17 November announced the two public forums to preview the proposed design. Individual user groups and stakeholders were contacted directly prior to the forums.

Three consultation workshops were held: a stakeholder forum on Wednesday 21 November and two public forums on 22 November and 1 December 2007.

Wording of the public notices inviting comment is provided below:

Have your say

If you walk, ride, jog, push a pram or just enjoy the foreshore of Commonwealth and Kings Parks you are invited to have your say about the proposed designs for the RG Menzies Walk.

The proposed designs will be displayed in the National Capital Exhibition daily from Thursday 22nd November - Saturday 15 December 2007.

Comments can be lodged via this website after completing a short survey on how you use and enjoy the Canberra Central Parklands.

Interested members of the public are also invited to attend a forum at the Canberra Business Events Centre, Regatta Point, Commonwealth Park on Thursday 22 November between 5.30pm - 7pm and on Saturday 1 December between 12.30pm - 3pm.

The design proposal for the RG Menzies Walk is the work of the winning designer from the Canberra Central Parklands Competition, awarded in June 2007.

Online and Hardcopy Survey and Public Comment Submissions

The survey form included 22 multiple choice questions and also provided opportunity for comment. The survey forms were available both on the NCA website address parklands@nationalcapital.gov.au and at the National Capital Exhibition, in conjunction with the presentation boards.

Consultations Outcomes

Analysis of the outcomes of consultations from all sources indicated that there were key areas for design review and resolution. The issues identified were broadly consistent, however certain user groups naturally tended to emphasise their particular issues.

The consultation process was effective in securing qualitative input from a range of sources. Input from all sources was reasonably consistent in terms of the issues identified. The process has also provided a sound foundation for future participation in the development and implementation of wider master planning for the Canberra Central Parklands.

The NCA received 49 online submissions and 13 hardcopy submissions. The stakeholder and public forums were relatively poorly attended, however insightful comments were provided by those who attended.

Once all comments, made through these various channels, were reviewed and collated, the following key areas for design review and resolution were established:

- A. Surface material
- B. Edge treatments/lighting
- C. Rest & breakout spaces
- D. Connectivity with adjacent areas
- E. Safety and signage
- F. Managing the impact of construction

The revised design of the RG Menzies Walk has been informed by the feedback provided during the consultation process and by an independent heritage assessment of the Walk. In undertaking these revisions, the NCA and Oxigen Landscape Architects have sought to balance the issues and concerns of the diverse groups consulted. An overview of the feedback is provided below and in the table provided in Appendix B.

Surface material

There were numerous comments submitted regarding the surface material of the Walk. Various user groups suggested preferences for concrete, asphalt or gravel.

Asphalt was seen as a preferred surface for certain cyclists and competitive runners. Gravel was seen by some as a more natural and cost effective alternative to other materials, however a solid surface was preferable for the majority of respondents, due to safety risks associated with loose gravel, pooled water, erosion and trip hazards.

While the initial capital cost of asphalt is less than concrete, as a flexible material it is more susceptible to tree roots, causing trip hazards. In addition, a wide, asphalt surface along the lake edge would be heat generating.

Gravel, while having an initial capital cost lower than that of concrete or asphalt, is not considered to be a suitable material for wheels (cycles, skaters and wheelchairs) and is the most difficult surface to maintain.

Concrete provides the surface least likely to provide risks to safety, is cost effective and a suitable solution to a lake edge site likely to have unforeseen subsoil conditions. Using concrete also allows for a variety of decorative surface treatments.

It is concluded that the RG Menzies Walk should be concrete, with an exposed aggregate finish, providing a durable and relatively safe surface with an attractive appearance and supporting the shared use character of the Walk. Gravel will be appropriately used in the design of breakout spaces and for secondary paths in the park.

An alternative, asphalt path through the parklands will be provided as an option for runners and cyclists.

Edge treatments / lighting

Many participants commented that appropriate lighting would make a positive contribution to the RG Menzies Walk, by allowing the area to be more accessible at night. Also raised was the need to have a distinct “parklands” character for the Walk, as distinct to the more formal built edge found on the south side of the lake’s central basin.

The lighting design for the Walk will be developed to provide a distinct character for the Canberra Central Parklands and will provide an appropriate level of illumination.

Rest & breakout spaces

Many participants expressed the need for adequate seating in regularly spaced rest areas. The Walk design includes widened areas which will provide seating, shade and drinking fountains.

It was also requested that there be sufficient provisions for a turning area for competitive races being staged in the parklands. The 4.5 metre wide path and adjacent breakout spaces will provide improved turning areas for recreational and competitive use.

Connectivity with adjacent areas

Many users have raised the difficulties in accessing the Walk. The proposed design will make provision for a new ramp and stair connection to Kings Avenue bridge. The existing stair connection to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge will be retained and its connection to the Walk strengthened.

Connections and improved pedestrian access into the parklands from surrounding areas are being considered as part of the ongoing development of the Canberra Central Parklands Master Plan.

Safety & signage

The proposed design seeks to facilitate equitable use of the Walk – for users who cycle, walk, run or push prams. Many comments suggested that the new path would and should increase the diversity of users. Increasing activity may in turn, generate a desire for alternative routes/surfaces for some users, which will be considered as part of the overall master plan.

In parts of the current path system tree roots are pushing through creating a safety issue. Construction of the Walk will be detailed to minimize disturbance from tree roots.

There were many suggestions regarding signage along the Walk, including improved directional and guidance signage. Appropriate interpretative, behavioural and directional signage will be incorporated into the design.

Behavioural signage, plus the generous (4.5 metre) width of the Walk, will encourage safe use by the anticipated variety of users and modes of movement, without the need to separate users by lines or indicative markings.

An alternative, line marked route through the parklands will be provided as part of the project..

Management of construction

Inevitably, the reconstruction works themselves will have a temporary impact on users and some local businesses. The consultations have provided a good basis for the NCA to work with businesses and user groups to minimize and manage any impacts. As the project progresses, the NCA will continue to involve the various interested parties.

Public notices advising the public of the works program will be included as part of the management of construction.

Next Steps

The final design drawings, which include the revisions made following the consultation process will be available at parklands@nationalcapital.gov.au.

As the next stage of the project, tenders will be invited for the project management and implementation of the RG Menzies Walk.

Conclusion

By employing a range of consultation techniques, the NCA was able to process a spectrum of public issues and commentary relating to the proposed RG Menzies Walk and establish a depth of qualitative input.

The consultation process has informed and enhanced the design for the Walk project including:

- A range of seating, facilities, and points of interest at rest areas along the Walk;
- Edge treatments offering additional safety for those using strollers and wheelchairs; and
- Connections to alternative routes through the parklands, providing options for runners and cyclists.

APPENDIX A

The Canberra Central Parklands

The Canberra Central Parklands comprise Commonwealth Park, Kings Park and Rond Terraces. The Parklands are nationally significant because of their place in the Griffin Plan and for the blending of commemorative and natural locations. The Parklands are also locally significant as the largest and most heavily used open spaces in the city.

The development of the Parklands has occurred in a series of phases dating back to the 1920s, the most significant during the physical development of Lake Burley Griffin in the 1960s. Commonwealth Park, the city's most popular open space, has been developed as an informal, curvilinear layout of exotic trees drifts under-planted with shaded shrubbery, all contrasted with open grasses areas and water elements. The master plan guiding development of the Park was the work of Sylvia Crowe, a British landscape designer, in conjunction with William Holford, a British town planner.

However, a number of more recent factors have contributed to the need to examine the future development and management of the parklands:

- Prolonged drought conditions
- Ageing infrastructure
- Growing community and public event use
- Increasing recognition of the role in commemoration and celebration
- The Griffin Legacy

In addition, some areas of Kings Park have not been significantly developed to cater for their potential public use.

In February 2007, the NCA launched an international landscape design competition for the Canberra Central Parklands. The winning design needed to;

- Increase connectivity between areas within the parklands and between

parklands and the city

- Respect the heritage values of the parklands
- Develop a continuous public promenade from bridge to bridge (RG Menzies Walk)
- Create innovative public spaces suitable for a range of public events, commemorative services and visitor activities
- Develop a strategy for parklands infrastructure
- Expand opportunities for interaction with Lake Burley Griffin
- Develop a sustainable landscape management plan

In June 2007, the winning entry was awarded to Oxigen Landscape Architects, who were subsequently engaged by the NCA to develop a detailed master plan for the Parklands. Oxigen were also engaged to develop for construction, the first project for implementation, the RG Menzies Walk.

As part of the master plan, Oxigen have developed a series of design principles for the Parklands:

1. Geometry;
2. Landscape Dominance;
3. Incremental Layering;
4. Local Identity;
5. Scale;
6. Environmental Responsibility;
7. Connection and Access;
8. Great Spaces;
9. Activation and Commemoration; and
10. Structure.

These principles have also informed the design on the RG Menzies Walk.

APPENDIX B**RG Menzies Walk – Summary of consultation issues, designer response and design actions**

Topic	Comments / Issues	Designer's Response	Design Actions
A. Surface Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Gravel is a more natural surface and is cheaper – Concrete is not a desirable surface for competitive runners – Asphalt was seen as a preferred surface for recreational and competitive runners and cyclists – Concerns raised that it is expensive to concrete area 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gravel is a good material as it is permeable and supports ESD initiatives. However, it is not a suitable material for wheels (cycles, skaters and wheelchairs) and is difficult to maintain in a good condition. Gravel will be used elsewhere in the parks as secondary pathways with a lower requirement for accessibility. 2. Concrete is a commonly used material as it results in a smooth, safe and accessible surface, it is cost effective and allows a variety of different surface treatments. An alternative route for runners will be provided. 3. See comment above regarding runners. Cyclists are well accommodated with either concrete or asphalt. 4. Initial capital cost of asphalt is less than concrete but as a flexible material it is very susceptible to tree roots which causes trip hazards. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. RG Menzies Walk to be constructed from concrete with gravel in some breakout spaces and secondary paths. 2. Alternative asphalt path system to accommodate user groups with this preference. 3. See comment above. 4. See comment above.
B. Edge treatments/ Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Elegant south side lighting should be replicated in park – Lighting would make area useful at night 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Need to have a distinct "parklands" character as distinct to the more formal built edge found on the south side. 6. The level of illumination is currently being considered. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Lighting appropriate to the context of the parklands will be sourced. 6. Lighting levels will be appropriate to the use of the Walk.
C. Rest & breakout spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Turning area for runners competing in Kings Park – Provision of seating in breakout areas 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Path is 4.5 m wide at a minimum and should provide adequate space for turning. 8. A variety of seating opportunities will be provided in the break out areas, including low sitting walls and bench seats. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Included in the design of the Walk. 8. Included in the design of the Walk.

D. Connectivity with parks & bridges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal of bridge at Nerang Pool and new alignment of proposed bridge may limit usefulness of existing cycle route - Access to path from bridges difficult and needs improvement - Connection with all paths in park and around the lake need to be considered, especially connection across Bowen Drive - Connection from Russell, very difficult to cross traffic to access park 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. An alternative cycle route, independent of the removed or proposed bridge, has been developed. 10. Provision for a new connection to Kings Avenue bridge will be included as part of the Walk. Existing connection to Commonwealth Avenue bridge will be retained and connection to the Walk strengthened. 11. Improving access from the south side of the central basin onto Kings Avenue bridge (across Bowen Drive) is not within the scope of this project, however the NCA is finalising designs for an improved crossing, due to be completed by April 2008. 12. Better connections to adjacent areas are being considered as part of the ongoing development of the Canberra Central Parklands master plan. The current NCA project to replace the Russell roundabout with an overpass will improve pedestrian connection to the parklands from Russell. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. New links to be provided to create a continuous alternative cycle route through parklands. 10. Provision for a new connection to Kings Avenue bridge will be included as part of the works. 11. All connections will be considered as part of the development of the master plan.. 12. See comment above.
E. Safety & Signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting equitable use; cycle, walk, run, pushing prams - Path needs a centre line to help keep people to left - New path could increase mixed use. May need to look at alternate routes/surfaces through park for cyclists, runners - Widening of path good - Tree roots pushing path up in places - Behavioural signage needed along the walk - Signs for start and end of walk in addition to plaques - Signs about not feeding wildlife - Signage indicating toilets/refreshments/entry points 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. The proposed 4.5 metre wide path will provide a sufficiently generous width to allow for use by multiple and varied users.. 14. The proposed 4.5 metre wide path will provide safe use by a variety of users and modes of movement without the need to separate users. 15. See 2. and 9. above 16. Noted. The path will also be widened from the minimum width of 4.5 metres at points which encourage other uses such as sitting and casual recreation. 17. The construction of the new walk will be detailed to minimize future disturbance from tree roots. 18. Interpretive, behavioural and directional signage will be included in the project. 19. See comment above. 20. See comment above. 21. See comment above. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. Achieved with the proposed path width. 14. Behavioural signage and an alternative, line marked route will be provided, rather than line marking the Walk. 15. See 2. and 9. above. 16. see 13. above 17. Concrete path will be detailed to minimise disturbance by tree roots. 18. Interpretive, directional and behavioural signage will be included. 19. See comment above. 20. See comment above 21. See comment above.
F. Managing impact of construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informing businesses and event organisers of construction approach 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 22. Consultation will continue with affected parties to minimise and manage the impacts of construction. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 23. NCA will liaise with and inform affected members of the public regarding the construction program.