

MOLONGLO VALLEY LIBRARY CO-DESIGN

REPORT ON WHAT WE HEARD

Canberrans were invited to help shape the vision of the future Molonglo Valley Library and community hub from 26 March 2024 to 6 May 2024.

The new library and community hub will be located in the heart of the future Molonglo Valley Group Centre. It will be an important resource for not only Molonglo Valley residents but the wider Canberra community. The library and community hub will offer access to library collections, areas for community use and a space for community services to meet the needs of a population of up to around 70,000 by 2050.

Feedback received for this first stage of community engagement will inform a functional design brief that captures the community's vision for the new buildings. The design brief will include:

- desired architectural, public realm and landscape character, and aspirations for cultural connections
- guidance on site context and precinct connections
- operational principles for access and wayfinding; safety and security considerations; sustainability and technology
- functional area descriptions and spatial requirements
- best practice case studies.

Three concept designs will be prepared for the community to provide feedback on in the second stage of engagement. Together with the design brief, the final concept design will inform future design and construction.

THE CONVERSATION

A wide variety of methods were used to engage the community including interactive displays in library branches, an online survey, vision board and kids' corner, community pop-ups and presentations, a university students design charette and workshops with the Ngunnawal community.

The interactive displays in our nine library branches proved very popular with people leaving more than 720 comments. During the consultation period, library visitors provided feedback by voting on the type of facilities and programs they would like in the future library and what they thought made a successful library as well as offering their feedback on what they liked about their current branch (and one thing they would change).

An online survey was open on the YourSay website during the consultation period for the community to provide feedback. A total of 304 surveys were completed. Canberrans of all ages were also invited to share their ideas for the future library via an online vision board and kids' corner, we received 21 ideas in total.

Three pop-up sessions were held at Coombs Shops, Woden Library and Denman Prospect shops to promote the consultation and provide the community with an opportunity to provide feedback in person via interactive displays and to ask questions of the project team. A total of 45 people provided feedback during the three pop-ups.

Bagariin Ngunnawal Cultural Consulting conducted two community workshops with members of the Ngunnawal community at Wildbark @ Mulligans Flat to gain cultural inputs from Traditional Custodians. Bagariin also liaised with the Dhaurwa Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee to gather their insights.



WHO WE ENGAGED

The consultation targeted current library members and Molonglo residents as well as non-library members and Canberrans more broadly. Workshops were also held with Traditional Custodians and library staff.

Survey respondents

- 60% of survey respondents currently live in Molonglo Valley, 5% are planning to live there in the future and 35% live in other regions (including around 12% in Woden or Weston Creek)
- We heard from more females (69%) than males (27%) as part of the survey. Most respondents (78%) were aged 25-54. 8% were aged 18 years or younger, and 14% were over 55 years of age.
- More than half of the survey participants were working full time. Nearly a quarter (24%) worked part time. 14% were caring for a young child (under 5 years of age). 8% were retired and 13% were students (in primary or high school, or at university).
- 1.3% of respondents identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 16% speak a language other than English at home.
- Most respondents currently visit the library monthly (40%), weekly (30%) or once or twice a year (20%).

Library visitors

Feedback from the community was received across all library branches, including Woden, Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Civic, Dickson, Kippax, Gungahlin, Erindale and Kingston. Comments were received from a range of Canberrans, with responses relating to people with young children, older people, people from a range of cultural backgrounds, people with lived experience of disability (including neurodivergent experiences) and students.

Ngunnawal community

Members of the Ngunnawal community were invited to provide feedback on the project through two face to face workshops and an online presentation to the Dhaurwa Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee.

Molonglo community and key stakeholder groups

The broader Molonglo community and identified key stakeholder groups were provided with information and invited to provide feedback on the project. Key groups we presented to included the:

- Molonglo Valley Community Forum
- Ministerial Advisory Council for Women
- Transport Canberra and City Services Accessibility Reference Group.

Libraries ACT

Staff working for Libraries ACT (in the branches and in supporting administrative / program coordination roles) provided input as part of staff workshops, an interactive session at an all-staff planning day, and via a staff working group.

Tertiary students

University of Canberra architecture students participated in a design charette to consider what the library of the future might look like, what spaces need to be included, and the particular needs of a range of library users.



Key insights from the community about the new library and community hub

A central location that is easy to get to

1. One of the main reasons people indicated they were not using their local library more was a lack of parking close by (including free parking) and limited convenient public transport access. The new library will need to be well located with public car parking close by (including accessible parking and short stay / drop off spaces) and excellent connections to the public transport and cycling network.

Equitable, accessible and safe library spaces

2. The library needs to provide equal access for all members of the community including people with disabilities. The community would like to see a variety of spaces offered in the new library including areas where children can safely access the book collections and community programs. Programs within the library and associated spaces should feel welcoming and easy to use for everyone, of all abilities. The library should also feel safe and welcoming for Canberra's more vulnerable citizens.

Collections remain at the heart of the library

3. Feedback from the community demonstrated a continuing love of reading and books. Borrowing / returning books is the main reason most respondents currently visit the library. Making sure the library collection has enough books available to meet demand is important (including contemporary collections, young adult fiction and children's books, comics / manga, as well as a strong collection of non-fiction and literature, and books in languages other than English). Digital collections, including audiobooks, movies and CDs also remain popular and should be incorporated into the new collection space. The new library should have a variety of options for comfortable reading spaces throughout the building.

A library with potential for learning, socialising and accessing technology

4. The new library will be an important social resource for the community, with people most wanting to be able to visit the library to read / study / research, attend a community class, go to a café, use the internet / photocopier / printer or enjoy the library with their children. The new library will play an important role, particular for vulnerable Canberrans, as a place where knowledge and technology is accessible and free in a welcoming and comfortable environment.

Make it easy to borrow and return books

5. Ensuring that it is convenient and accessible for library users to borrow books, access reservations (both during library hours as well as after hours) and to make returns is important. Feedback from the community suggested that if it is too difficult to borrow or return books people are less likely to visit the library.

Expand opening hours so more people can access the library

6. While around a third of people are happy with the current opening hours for libraries in Canberra, most people would like to see libraries open longer. 36% of responses were in favour of late afternoon / evening hours for the new library. There was also support for early morning hours and 24/7 access, or for longer hours on the weekends.

Enable connections to the outdoors and nature

7. The new library and community hub building should be connected to the outside, with access to natural light. In particular, feedback suggested that library visitors would enjoy the opportunity to read, study and write outside (in a protected and safe environment). There is a desire by some in the community to see the library collection (and community programs) expand to include access to nature – including potential for a seed library. An outdoor playspace was also something the community expressed interest in.



Consider acoustics and programming in the spaces

8. The new library will need to accommodate a range of programs and uses for a diverse group of library visitors. This will include programs for young children, spaces for group and individual study / research, areas for young people to hang out and play games (electronic and analogue) and areas for quiet reading and work. Careful consideration of how 'noisy' and 'quiet' spaces interact will be important in the design of the new library to ensure all visitors feel comfortable. Inclusion of low sensory spaces would also be a great addition to the new library, as well as spaces for people to read together (such as book 'cubbies') or to collaborate (for example in acoustic seating pods).

Access to food and drink, with space to relax and play

9. Creating connections in the library to a café, and including an outside play area for children, would be welcomed by the community so that people can access food and drink during their visit. This is also an important opportunity for families with young children to foster connections made through library programs. These spaces will need to be carefully located to ensure quiet reading, study and research is still possible within the library building. A free 'community members lounge' / kitchenette would also be a welcome addition (where visitors can make free tea and coffee or heat up their own lunch).

Support cultural connection

10. Feedback from the Ngunnawal community told us that retaining the natural heritage (including existing significant trees) will be important when thinking about the location of the site for the new building. The building ideally would also connect directly with the surrounding Country – with a new 'living library', referencing local natural materials as features, and including Ngunnawal totems (in consultation with Traditional Custodians) within the building or associated landscape / public realm. The design of the building should also reflect the Molonglo River, inside the building and in its landscape. Creating spaces for sharing of culture and knowledge will be important, as well as creating culturally sensitive places for community to gather.
11. Welcoming the diverse multicultural community into the library will also be important, with opportunities to expand access to cultural information and to bilingual collections and programs, as well as offering a range of spaces for community to connect and share culture.

Create spaces for the community

12. The new library will be an important community hub in the heart of the new Molonglo Valley Town Centre. Feedback suggests there is demand for spaces the community can use for group classes, small gatherings (such as for book club conversations), for community events (for example, author visits or small community performances), makers' spaces (to enable community art and craft programs), and a small gallery for community exhibitions (including for display of local heritage and culture).

Make it a demonstration of sustainable planning and design

13. The library and community hub building should be resilient to climate change, demonstrating excellent sustainable design and building practices, and providing a place of refuge for more vulnerable community members during times of extreme weather.

Libraries have the potential to make visitors 'feel good' and part of the community

14. Feedback from visitors to existing branches indicates our libraries make many people feel happy, calm, relaxed and 'at home'. Negative emotions (related to not being able to eat or feeling anxiety when visiting the library) can be avoided in the new library by providing spaces where people feel supported, with access to more open and natural surroundings (and a place to eat). The community has clear expectations the new library will be a welcoming, accessible, modern place that promotes community, fosters innovation, offers quiet and safe spaces, is well-stocked with books, and is beautiful.





'This library makes me feel…'
Wordcloud based on 193 responses from branch visitors.



'What three words do you hope people use to describe the new library?'
Wordcloud created from more than 1,000 words submitted in the YourSay survey.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Feedback received during the first stage of consultation will inform the concept designs and functional design brief for the future library and community hub.

The community will have an opportunity to provide feedback on three concept designs for the future Molonglo Valley Library in the middle of this year.

Project updates will continue to be provided via the Molonglo Valley Library YourSay page.

You can also register to receive project updates by emailing communityengagement@act.gov.au

Key Timings
26 March 2024: Community consultation opens
6 April 2024: Coombs shops pop-up
13 April 2024: Woden Library pop-up
2 May 2024: Denman Prospect shops pop-up
6 May 2024: Community consultation closes
June 2024: What We Heard report released **[we are here]**
Mid 2024: Consultation on three concept designs

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

1,000+ a total of 1,094 people visited the YourSay page	**300+** a total of 304 people completed the online survey	**45** we spoke to 45 individuals during our 3 pop-ups	**2** we held 2 workshops with Traditional Custodians
17,000+ we reached an audience of 17,183 via ACT Government social media accounts	**720+** we received 725 comments via our interactive displays in library branches	**21** 21 ideas were shared via the online vison board and kids' corner	**87%** most survey respondents (87%) were satisfied with the engagement experience