Council to lodge appeal

By Elliot Woods

THE North Canberra Community Council (NCCC) will appeal the green light given to develop land at the old Australian Heritage Village in North Watson.

A development application for 316 affordable homes was approved last week, however, members from the NCCC, Friends of Mount Majura and the Hackett Community Association have voiced deep concerns about the project.

Of particular concern was the maintenance of the area and degradation of the surrounding bushland. Several endangered species, like the regent honeyeater, inhabit the area and fears have been raised by council members that development will drive them away.

The appeal will be lodged this week.

At an NCCC meeting held on Wednesday night, members voted unanimously to oppose the development in the form of an appeal.

NCCC chair Jochen Zeil said the council was all for affordable, sustainable housing, however, issues regarding the methods by which the development was being pushed ahead were causing concern.

"The DA has gone through with very few alterations. We are still debating the same issues – the traffic study is the same and so are the hard edges which will run along the native corridors," he said.

"Our main concerns are the hard edges where there are just metres between the buildings and the bushland.

"We are also quite concerned about the maintenance of the land, since the lease changed hands, it has been run into the ground with weeds and pests. Planning mistakes cause community conflict – we want to be a part of this to ensure mistakes are not made in the first place."

The land, which was rezoned from Leisure and Tourism to Residential, will attract hundreds more cars to the area every day.

The NCCC are also concerned that without a more comprehensive transport system assisting the inner north, the extra traffic will cause major headaches.

The appeal will be made to the ACT Civil and Administration Tribunal, who will have the final say on whether the development goes ahead.

While new submissions to the tribunal will not be accepted, individuals or groups who voiced opposition in the first stage of planning have a right to appeal.

Groups who have not objected can only appeal as a piggyback option on the back of an original complainant.

While the Hackett Community Association made no original objection, this loophole has allowed them to merge with the NCCC and contribute to fight the development.

The complicated appeals process required the assistance of Environmental Defender's Office legal advisor, Kirsten Miller, to better explain grounds of defence.

She suggested the best plan of attack for the NCCC would be through s.129(g) of the Planning and Development Act, which states "the probable impact of the proposed development, including the nature, extent and significance of probable environmental impacts."

Mr Zeil and other residents suggested the minimal buffer between bushland and the buildings would fit within these terms and must be considered.

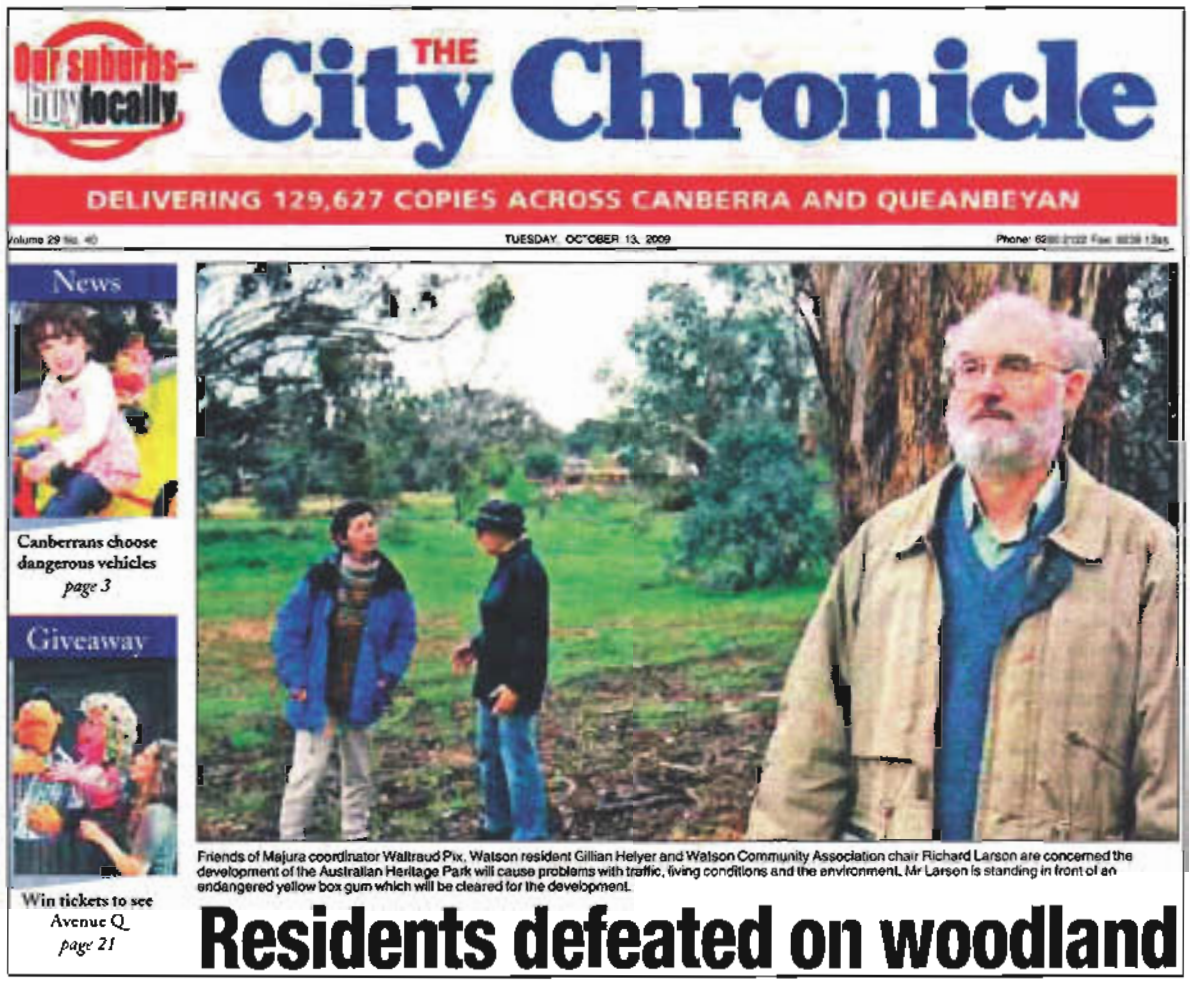
Throughout the meeting, Mr Zeil maintained neither he nor the NCCC had any problems with affordable housing when constructed in the appropriate way.

"The NCCC has no problem with sustainable housing, no problem with environmentally friendly housing and no problems with affordable housing, but we would like to see it all done in a responsible way," he said.

A spokeswoman for the developers, Village Building Company, said she would contact Mr Zeil to organise a meeting between the two parties.

She said while measures to protect the environment had already been addressed, she was confident both sides would leave the meeting with a positive outlook regarding the development. "The Village Building Company recognises that a healthy natural and built environment is vital to achieving its sustainability objectives for the site at North Watson and has approached the Conservation Council, the North Canberra Community Council and others to meet and discuss various aspects of the development," she said.

"All concerns raised by the ACT Government have been addressed, including matters such as housing, energy efficiency, bushfire protection and environmental protection."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Residents defeated on woodland
Friends of Majura coordinator Waltraud Pix, Watson resident Gillian Helyer and Watson Community Association chair Richard Larson are concerned the development of the Australian Heritage Park will cause problems with traffic, living conditions and the environment. Mr Larson is standing in front of an endangered yellow box gum which will be cleared for the development.

The North Canberra Community Council will continue their fight to stop a development from going ahead at the old Australian Heritage Village in North Watson.

The Australian Heritage Village will house 316 new affordable dwellings unless the NCCC appeal is successful. The site is currently not being used.

IN BRIEF

MOTOCROSS

SOME of Australia's top professionals and Under 19's Motocross and Supercross riders will sample the 2010 MX Nationals Canberra track at the ACT Motorcycle Club this Sunday. They will compete with local club rider's on the track that they will use for round two of the Rockstar MX Nationals on April 18. For more information visit www.actmcc.com.au.

TENANT GRANTS

HOUSING ACT is offering grants of up to $5000 to social and community housing tenants. In 2009, 28 grants were provided to individual tenants and to tenant groups. A number of community organisations are available to support those who would like assistance in applying for or managing a grant project. These include Tricia at the Belconnen Community Service – 6278 8110, Sally at the Northside Community Service – 6257 2255, Lynton at the Woden Community Service – 6282 2644 and Claudia of the YWCA of Canberra in Tuggeranong – 6294 4633. For more information contact Mary Burns on 6207 0902, or download an application form from www.dhcs.act.gov.au/hcs/public—housing/community—linkages—program.

Applications close on the March 12, so tenants are urged to start preparing applications now.

TROPFEST

HUNDREDS of Canberrans packed the park on Sunday evening to see the Tropfest finalists on the big screen. The short film festival has become a favourite in the Capital since making its debut. The 2010 signature item was a dice. Abe Forsythe from NSW was awarded first prize at by a panel of celebrity judges for his film 'Shock'. Forsythe is a veteran of the festival having first entered when he was 16. An estimated 150,000 people tuned in across Australia to see Forsythe's work this year, as well as the other 15 finalists. Tropfest featured in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Perth, Hobart, Adelaide, Gold Coast and Brisbane.

TIP INFRINGEMENTS

WORKING in conjunction with ACT Rangers and Road Transport Authority inspectors, ACT Policing issued 75 Traffic Infringement Notices (TINs) last week as part of a crackdown on vehicles using the public roads to and from Canberra's waste management facilities.

Police Traffic Operations used the RAPID number plate recognition system to screen vehicles and trailers, while ACT Rangers assessed load security and RTA officers performed kerbside roadworthiness assessments.