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North Watson agreement reached

By Carmen McIntosh

THE Fair housing development at the Australian Heritage Village at North Watson will go ahead without delay following an agreement being reached between the developers and community groups.

The development was approved by the ACT Planning and Land Authority in February and was potentially subject to third party appeal by the North Canberra Community Council (NCCC) due to their concerns of environmental impacts and traffic issues.

But last week an agreement was signed between the NCCC, Friends of Mount Majura, Watson Community Association, The Conservation Council ACT Region and the Village Building Company (VBC), with VBC agreeing to undertake additional conservation and traffic measures.

VBC CEO Bob Winnel said a series of constructive meetings with community group representatives over the past two weeks had led to a better outcome for all involved.

''I think the whole negotiations were a better way of doing business than having a confrontation, having the lays of going through the appeal, and then at the end of an appeal someone wins or loses but the other party doesn't really get anything out of it,'' he said.

''The changes are largely things that we're going to do offsite.

''We'll be providing, or funding the provision of a walking trail, some revegetation on the adjacent nature reserve, weed control and some interpretive signage, [and] we'll be introducing regulations within the community title body corporate to ensure that cats and dogs are retained to be within the properties that are owned by each owner.

''We'll [also] work with the community groups in getting the information together to advocate traffic calming on Antill Street. ''[The agreements reached] will add $600 or $700 to the cost of each dwelling, but the negotiations were reasonably conducted.''

Village Building Company CEO Bob Winnel and general manager Hans Sommer at the Australian Heritage Village site. The development will now go ahead without delay following an agreement with local community groups. **Picture: Elesa Lee**

However some members of the NCCC believe their concerns were not entirely addressed in the agreement. Watson Community Association chair Richard Larson said the committee was moderately divided, with two members unwilling to sign the agreement and the other six signing it with concern.

''There is a significant number of people who will probably still be unhappy, but we consider this a good agreement and it's going to help us to help the nature reserve and meet some of our social concerns,'' he said.

''I think the process was good, we sat down, we talked, and we came to common ground.'' Coordinator of the Friends of Mount Majura Waltraud Pix said the agreement was a positive outcome both for the environment and for the people who will be living close to the nature reserve.

''It will help to foster community stewardship over the significant values of the park and to protect these values for the enjoyment of locals and visitors alike,'' she said.

The development will ultimately provide 316 affordable houses – averaging over 30 to the hectare, and incorporating 11 per cent open space.

VBC first earmarked the site for development eight years ago, and expect house and land packages to be released in the next four to six weeks.