

*Caring for  
Curtin*

# Curtin Residents Association Inc. *Newsletter*

12 May 2020

The Curtin Residents Association hopes you are well, and reminds you to stay careful, especially as restrictions lift. That virus is still out there, even if we've been going stir crazy. Take care—we wish you all the best.

Our local businesses need your support. Restaurants and cafés still need your business, even if few of us can sit down at a time under the current restrictions. We can still order for pickup or delivery for a meal at home, with the advantage of somebody else doing the cooking! See [www.feedfeed.com.au](http://www.feedfeed.com.au) for an up-to-date list of local hospitality businesses that have adapted to physical distancing measures (but note that the list is not complete—there are more complying businesses that are open).

## **Adopt-a-Park project in Curtin**

The Curtin Residents Association and the Curtin Garden Group were given a grant from the ACT Government's Adopt-a-Park scheme at the end of 2019. The project is to develop a native garden in the Western Open Space, at the conjunction of the green spaces and walks between the ends of Philp Place and Colebatch Place (near the old Scout hall), and for tree planting in the arms of the Western Open Space. The ACT Government pays for the plants and digs the ground, and the Garden Group does the planning and planting. Here's an update from Evan Mann of the Garden Group:

Planting and mulching of the native garden was completed in the last weekend of April, just in time for the rain. Aside from some boundary definition with pine logs, this part of the project is now completed. It looks good and I am sure as it develops it will become a feature in this central part of the suburb. We have also completed stage 1 of the tree planting though of course some potted trees and all our tubestock for stage 2 remain at the Yarralumla Nursery and Greening Australia. Latest advice from City Services is that it will be several weeks at least before they are likely to give approval for this planting to proceed.

You may have noticed that the latest stimulatory package announced by the Chief Minister included a program of tree planting by contractors across the city, including in Woden. Hopefully



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what is permitted for contractors will soon be allowed for community volunteers. Certainly it would be good to get the Curtin tubestock in the ground before too many weeks have passed.

All up, though, we can be pleased with what we have achieved over the past few weeks and we look forward to seeing the grasses, shrubs and trees flourish over the coming year. Thanks to those of you who helped out with the garden and/or the trees. It was a pity more of us could not work together on the project because of the COVID restrictions but hopefully this will be possible for stage 2 of the tree planting. Richard Bush will also be looking for ongoing help in maintaining the garden. We will keep you informed of developments.

## Floriade bulbs for local suburbs

Because Floriade has been cancelled for COVID-19, the bulbs that were prepared for planting have been offered to community groups to brighten up the suburbs. The Garden Group was awarded a whole batch of bulbs that need to be planted before the end of May. We have over 600 bulbs to be planted—help is wanted, please! Contact Evan Mann at [evan.mann@netspeed.com.au](mailto:evan.mann@netspeed.com.au) if you can help, even for a short time.

Fiona Carrick at Woden Valley Community Council also has loads of bulbs for other Woden suburban shopping centres. You are invited to come along to local shops (Torrens, Pearce, Chifley, Lyons and Swinger Hill) and plant some bulbs on the weekend of 16–17 May 2020. Email [president@wvcc.org.au](mailto:president@wvcc.org.au) for times and places.

## Building development at 41-44 Curtin Place

The building demolition and rebuilding on the western side of Curtin Square is continuing behind black fences to the courtyard and behind open fencing around the back. Concrete has been poured around the excavation as retaining walls and there are visible foundations for the building columns. Temporary public toilets have been installed in place of the demolished block.

## Keeping an eye on the site

There are no fences to protect the established trees inside the site, in violation of the plans that were submitted for approval. We have written to Development Minister Gentleman and City Services Minister Steel but no action has been seen. There are no protections for the trees alongside the commercial waste bins for other businesses—TCCS (Transport Canberra and City Services) should be managing this better. Again, we have written to Minister Steel.

The public toilets have been demolished and there are two temporary portables by the carpark at the southern end of the site, provided by the



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developer. This is not enough! We need at least three when COVID-19 restrictions on public activities are lifted; the three public toilets in the old block were barely sufficient. Minister Chris Steel has assured us that replacement toilet facilities must be like for like with the old. We have written to Chris Steel, who is also one of our local ACT Legislative Assembly members, to ask him to ensure that the new building will provide like for like public toilets, and that the temporary arrangements are also as good. We believe that 'like for like' should mean at least three public toilets, in addition to any toilets in the building for commercial operations such as restaurants.

We have made some progress on this issue. The Development Application (DA) that was recently submitted and approved to consolidate (merge) the two blocks (the land for the shops and the toilets) was approved with conditions that included this reminder to the developer:

- Temporary public toilets must be provided and maintained by the developer until the replacement toilets become available

but there is no statement of how many toilets should be provided.

The draft of the new lease that is included with the decision states:

- The lessee shall complete ... prior to the commencement of any trading or business from the premises, the design and construction of replacement publicly accessible toilet facilities on the ground floor level of the consolidated block as approved by Development Application number 201630437 dated on 7 December 2018

and:

- the toilet facilities on the consolidated block will be available for public use at all times.

The word used is 'replacement' but no plans with more than two toilets have been seen publicly. The conditions on the 2018 DA were that the developer had to make agreements with TCCS—but we do not know how many toilets were required in this agreement, as there is no transparency or public scrutiny at this stage in the approval progress. We have at least gained a statement that the toilets will be available at all times (not restricted to business hours as they might have been).

We will keep on pushing on the government to ensure sufficient public amenities in the finished building. As COVID restrictions lift, enabling more public activities in the square, we will ask the developer to install more temporary public toilets to match the old numbers.

## North Curtin Horse Paddocks land swap

The ACT Government and the National Capital Authority have announced in the press and by letters to users of the horse paddocks that the ACT-controlled open land bordering Cotter Road in north Curtin had been swapped for NCA-controlled land on the shore of west basin of Lake Burley Griffin. The intentions of the ACT government are to enable the building of high-rise residential development between Civic and the lake. The intentions of the NCA are to have land available for embassies for decades to come.

There has been a total absence of community consultation and no transparency in this process before the decisions were made. Consultation proposed to be held in the next two years is only a token gesture.



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This is a denial of all stated government policies to have transparent public consultation in planning. There was no hint of this development in the current Planning Strategy for the ACT of 2018, apart from a vague ‘densification’ dot placed generally over Curtin and a broad stripe along Adelaide Avenue for the ‘light rail land use investigation area.’ Is this good forward strategic planning or an opportunistic grab?

The ACT Planning Strategy states that the goals of Canberra and the Territory are to be liveable, sustainable and resilient. This space is in the public domain. Keeping it so is important for all of these goals.

The land lies between Cotter Road and Yarralumla Creek. This is at the point where the creek surroundings start to open out from the ugly suburban concrete drain that runs alongside Yarra Glen into a wider, more restful space, more friendly to humans and wildlife, and potentially more resilient. It’s a space with potential and the opportunity for improving the park-like grasses, shrubs and tree canopies that is of higher value to the ACT’s residents than as a development site. It is a component of the shrinking green space in the Woden Valley, and is a necessary part of the linked green support spaces along the creek and Molonglo River and over to the lake. It is a welcome outlook of trees and views along Cotter Road, relieving the mood and lifting mental burdens for commuters on their way home along this now-busy corridor. It provides wildlife habitat compatible with horse paddocks and formal green space. This area is a valuable part of the green open spaces in the Woden Valley and should be retained as open space. It has the potential to be developed into community parkland, with pathways and cycleways, and formed into significant recreational parklands along the creek.

The NCA manages large areas of the Territory as buffers and ridges in order to maintain the character of Canberra as a national capital in a bush setting. The NCA should add this area of north Curtin to its buffers and reserve system. Embassy land should be sought elsewhere.

The ‘swap first, ask a few questions after’ approach is another example of poor planning practice. Even if the strip of this land adjacent to Adelaide Avenue is to be developed for residential buildings by the ACT Government (when, if ever, the light rail makes its way to Woden), this kind of change to land use should be planned first in the context of a master plan, for the whole zone, that is openly debated and improved before execution. It must come with intention for traffic and active travel planning, not tack it on afterwards. It must not be done in increments of small but irreversible steps that preclude better planning of the whole for the best result.

Curtin resident and equestrian Sally Letts is calling for support through a petition to save the horse paddocks, at [www.change.org/p/national-capital-authority-act-government-save-north-curtin-horsepaddocks](http://www.change.org/p/national-capital-authority-act-government-save-north-curtin-horsepaddocks) and has over 1000 signatures so far.

For more information on the value of the green space and wildlife there is an article in *The RiotACT* dated 11 May titled ‘NCA’s embassy ambitions will destroy important bird corridor, says Curtin resident’.



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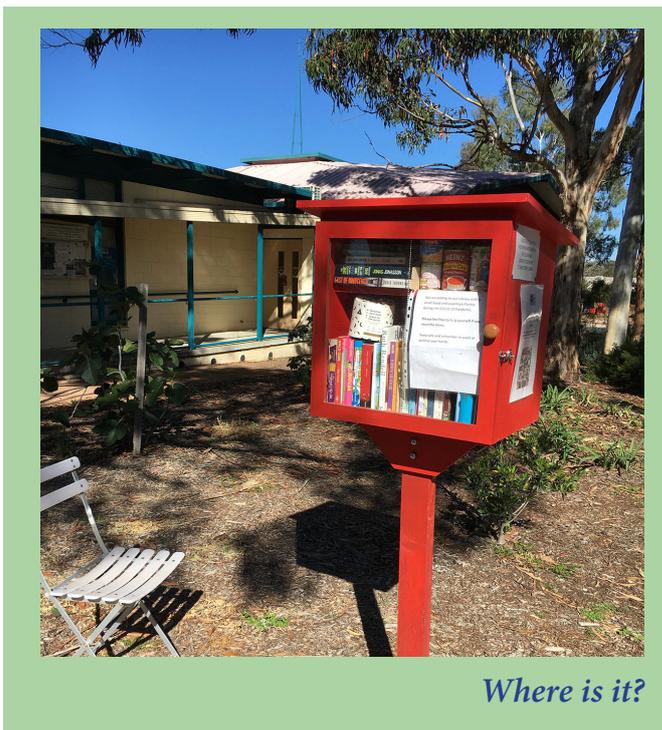
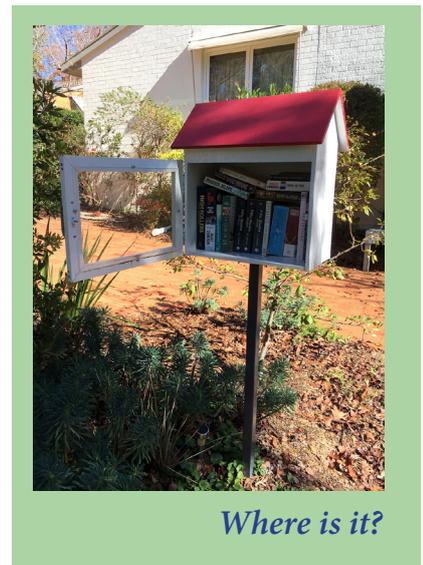
## Legislative Assembly inquiry into Curtin Precinct Code

The Curtin Precinct Code is the legislative instrument in the Territory Plan that controls future development in the Curtin Group Centre.

The ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal is holding an inquiry into the Draft Variation of the Territory Plan that gives legislative reality to the Master Plan for Curtin Group Centre (yes, that's Draft Variation 363, the endpoint of all the planning consultation that's been discussed over the last five years).

The Curtin Residents Association wrote to the Standing Committee on three points that had not been well taken from the Master Plan into the Variation:

- 1 The description of the rules for controlling the shadowing of buildings into the square. Picking only one date and time (noon on the midwinter solstice) is not suitable for the small Curtin courtyards and their alignment, and it is no longer necessary to do this for simplicity—computer modelling can be easily used to investigate other times of day and days of the year. The recent proposal for WOVA at the corner of Launceston Street and Melrose Drive demonstrates this, where the size and location of buildings took away nearly all the winter morning sun from the Bellerive buildings across Melrose Drive. Models of the shadowing showed that rearranging the buildings would be better.
- 2 The real need to have the description of vision for Curtin Group Centre in the Master Plan included with the description of Desired Character in the Precinct Code. The character is what controls several of the planning rules; the vision statement does not have the same force over new development applications. The important terms are the view of Curtin centre as an 'urban village' at 'human scale'.
- 3 Requiring setbacks of buildings along Strangways Street that maintain good tree canopy, compatible with having commercial frontages.



We hope that the assembly committee will listen to us and amend the Territory Plan with these steps. The Precinct Code will be used to control decisions about planning applications around Curtin Group Centre for many years—we think that it is important to keep trying to improve its deficiencies.

## Little street libraries

The ACT Libraries remain closed for now. What to do? When you're out walking for exercise solo or in small groups you may see the little street libraries, those colourful cupboards with books to borrow

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and exchange. Here's some encouragement: take along a bag with a few books that you have finished with and you think someone else might enjoy. Deposit a few, borrow a few—when you get home leave the books on a table (then wash your hands). In a couple of days you will have some new quarantined reading, improved by the anticipation (72 hours is plenty). And you will have given someone else the thrill of discovering a new author or revisiting a long-lost favourite.

Some of the little libraries in Curtin are:

- ☛ 5 Philp Place (on the wide green walkway between Philp Place and Waddell Place)
- ☛ St James Uniting Church (by the path from the traffic lights to the church carpark on Gillies Street)
- ☛ 10 Mair Place (on the green space—closed until ACT Public Libraries reopen)
- ☛ 25 Holman Street (corner of Champ Place)
- ☛ 3 Cockburn Street
- ☛ 6 Cockburn Street (the first little street library in Canberra)
- ☛ 35 Storey Street
- ☛ 43 Morgan Crescent.

There's a walking tour map of Curtin's little libraries at [goo.gl/maps/HtnX6MGfgGcXyYyn9](http://goo.gl/maps/HtnX6MGfgGcXyYyn9). It took us nearly 2 hours to walk the circuit but we were stopping, swapping and chatting all along the way.

To find out more about little street libraries in Canberra, look for 'Lil Street Libraries' on Facebook, and see [www.streetlibrary.org.au](http://www.streetlibrary.org.au).

An interactive map of all 'Street Library' little libraries in Australia is at [www.streetlibrary.org.au/find/](http://www.streetlibrary.org.au/find/).

Have you puzzled out where the little libraries in the photos are?

*Written and edited by Chris Johnson and Ann Parkinson,  
with contributions from the Curtin community*



*The first little street library  
in Canberra*

