Caring for Curtin

Curtin Residents Association Inc. Newsletter

28 April 2026

What's on in Curtin

Autumn Fair, Saturday 2 May

The Curtin Autumn Fair is ON! Saturday 2 May in Curtin Square at the shops from **10 am to 2 pm**.

There will be many stalls with books, crafts, jewellery, jams and chutneys, and community and development planning information.

Live music from Junior, a popular vocalist and guitarist. Sausage sizzle by the Woden Valley Community Council, for a small donation. We acknowledge WVCC's support for this event.

The stalls will include one from the National Capital Authority, for information and questions about their proposed conditions for the development of 1200 dwellings in North Curtin Residential Area (the former North Curtin horse paddocks). See more details about the development conditions on page 2.

Heritage walk, Sunday 3 May

On the day after the fair there is a guided Heritage walk around the Radburn housing precinct. Meet at 10 am at the playground next to the Scout hall.

Developments in Curtin

Marymead affordable housing

The period for comments on the development application for 54 affordable housing units on the site of the presbytery next to Holy Trinity church on Strangways Street has just closed. The Curtin Residents Association is generally in support of the development but we are concerned by the lack of any electric vehicle charging facilities, the reduction in promised carparking spaces on site and the poor quality of traffic survey that was used to support this case.

An active community group is opposed to the development because the building's bulk will overshadow Holy Trinity primary school and early learning centre, and the problems of traffic near the school will increase. They have a Facebook group page (search for 'Curtin presbytery site') and

a petition to the ACT Legislative Assembly. The petition closes on 27 May. It can be accessed at: https://epetitions.parliament.act.gov.au/details/e-pet-038-26.

North Curtin Residential Area: NCA at the Autumn Fair

This is a more complicated planning task than most developments. It's a big area on a greenfield site with no existing infrastructure, nestled into an already busy travel network; and it involves both the Federal Government's National Capital Authority (NCA) and the ACT Government's Suburban Land Agency (SLA). The NCA will set the overall conditions, then the SLA will make the development proposal details and sell it to developers. The North Curtin Residential Area is for a third of the horse paddocks area to provide around 1200 dwellings—a new half suburb's population (Curtin has about 2200 dwellings at present). The other part of the site is reserved for future diplomatic buildings.

The NCA has open consultation until Wednesday 10 June, and is holding information sessions including a table at the Curtin Autumn Fair on 2 May, again on Thursday 7 May and a larger information and consultation session in the evening on 13 May.

Wednesday 29 April, 8:30 am – 11:00 am at Yarralumla shops

Saturday 2 May, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm at the Curtin Autumn Fair

Thursday 7 May, 8:30 am – 11:00 am at Curtin shops

Wednesday 13 May 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm at the Southern Cross Club Woden and online.

The Residents Association has major concerns with this development. The starting point is that it's a lot of people in a small space. There are only two proposed road accesses, one into McCulloch Street and one into Cotter Road. Despite claiming to support less need for private cars, there's no strong indication of how the site might be connected to bicycle networks or the light rail (at present there's only a proposal for the light rail to trundle past—no tram stop!). NCA, Infrastructure Canberra and ACT Government please note: you need to join up your planning and solve this! At the moment it looks like each of the three planning authorities is regarding access for cars, pedestrians and active travellers as somebody else's problem, to be considered in future. Any new development that aims to shift residents' use of cars must generously provide for the alternatives up front, in planning requirements.

The NCA conditions propose a water ecology park on both sides of Yarralumla Creek between McCulloch St bridge and Yarra Glen, up to the 1% AEP flood level (previously known as the 100 year flood line). This is a good idea in principle—but the ACT government will need to commit resources and services to maintain this park, and provide public toilets to make it a public park. Some of the tallest buildings in the development are shown right on the edge of the park.

The draft conditions must be read carefully between the lines and the illustrations. Where the conditions state something 'must' be done—that's a real condition. This includes maximum building heights and minimum ceiling heights, open spaces and the water ecology park, 30% tree canopy cover—and a *maximum* 1-car parking space per dwelling (whether studio or 1, 2 or 3 bedrooms). But the diagrams and maps of layout of the blocks and roads are only 'indicative' and 'proposed'—not mandated conditions.

The Residents Association will develop more detailed points in response, and we'll discuss more in our next newsletter. For the proposed conditions see the NCA website Draft North Curtin Residential Area – Detailed Conditions for Planning, Design and Development. Two of the accompanying documents are the Explanatory Document, and the Draft Detailed Conditions Document that you can comment on. Once approved, this document will be used to guide and evaluate development proposals. Comments can be sent to NCA by email or in person at their consulting sessions. See: www.nca.gov.au/planning/public-consultations/northcurtindcpdd.

Re-vegetating Curtin's green spaces

A year or so after moving to Curtin in the 1970s, the original residents in the Radburn precinct were surveyed for their views in living in their unconventional suburban layout where each house faced public open space. The residents were generally happy with their lot but two points emerged. The first was their call for additional trees, which is not surprising given that there was hardly a tree in sight. Secondly, when asked if they were prepared to contribute to the maintenance of the green spaces, their answer was a resounding 'no'. Again, this was not surprising since the people moving in were mostly busy young families with little time for extra gardening chores.

Zoom forward 50 years and we see the formation of a number of volunteer groups of residents working with authorities to successfully re-vegetate Curtin's open spaces with native plants at Dawson Street, Gillies Street and in the Radburn area. These volunteers work hard to convert dull areas of weedy, compacted grass into vibrant areas of trees, shrubs and flowering forbs [plants that aren't grasses].

We have been inspired by ideas for community-run micro 'urban forests' in other cities aimed at reducing urban heat, locking carbon in the soil, reducing run-off and boosting biodiversity. A major social benefit of these exercises is the enhancement of peoples' wellbeing and sense of participation.

These projects improve the amenity of our parks, encourage people to linger, and provided examples for them to try in their own gardens.

In the Radburn area, over the past 6 years the Curtin Trees and Gardens Group, led by Evan Mann, has planted trees throughout the green belts and re-vegetated plots behind the Scout hall, in the park behind the Fred Ward aged care centre and, most recently, on the slopes forming the Carruthers Street northern underpass. These efforts have been in close cooperation with City Services and the government agencies responsible for community grants.

Two major grants were awarded. The first in 2020 was under the ACT Government's Adopt-a-Park program and involved planting about 100 trees and re-vegetating two small sections of a plot near the Scout hall of around 110 square metres. In preparing our plans we consulted the local community by way of a letter box drop and a public meeting in the park. The project was completed during the COVID lockdown period. This meant that the size of work parties was severely constrained. On the other hand, with so many people out walking it was also a valuable social occasion and, as we learnt, everyone in Curtin seems to have a view on tree selection.

Following the success of these efforts, John Davison-Mowle, who was associated with Dawson Street Gardens, suggested we extend plantings in the Radburn area and Dawson Street using Woody Meadows principles developed by the Botany School at Melbourne University. The idea is to restore the soil and plant densely to quickly establish ground cover and suppress weeds. Plants are coppiced [cut back] at intervals to maintain attractive compact plants and encourage flowering and juvenile foliage.

A joint application was made in 2023 under the ACT Environment Grants Program to revegetate a total of 220 square metres. The application was successful and the plantings were undertaken in autumn 2024 and the following spring and summer.

We embarked on an ambitious program of soil remediation. Using machinery, the top 10 cm of soil was scraped off and placed aside to compost down. The ground was ripped and left for 12 months. The machines came back in the autumn of 2024 to spread 5 cm of sand, 10 cm of additional native plant soil and the now-composted soil previously removed. The result was a perfect medium for planting and easy digging of plant holes. Plants have generally thrived in this environment and the promise of weed-free dense cover, has been achieved. It's not been all plain sailing. The severe frosts of 2025 have taken their toll and some plants have not proven to be suitable. Plant replacements have been an ongoing task.

The next stage in managing the Woody Meadow plots is to undertake some coppicing. We will approach this tentatively given that we are not sure how the plants will react. If we go too hard on the coppicing, we could lose certain species.

There is so much more to say about our Woody Meadows project. Plant selection and sourcing of hundreds of plants has been a journey and is ongoing. Original planting plans on paper and what exists on the ground now sometimes bear no resemblance. Should Residents Association members be interested, we are available for an information session with an opportunity to answer your questions. In addition, if members wished to help looking after any of the planting projects in Radburn mentioned above or with new plantings, they are encouraged to contact Richard at r.h.bush@bigpond.net.au or Evan at ejm1397@gmail.com.

Richard Bush and Evan Mann

Written by Chris Johnson and named contributors, edited and designed by Ann Parkinson. Contributions welcome!