

THE WATZON

Newsletter of the Watson Community Association Inc.

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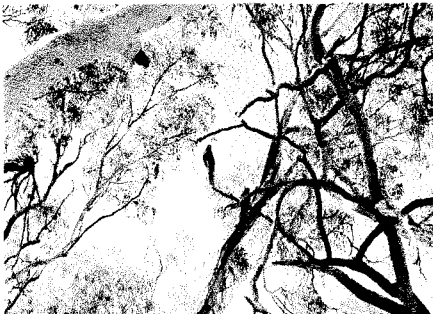
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Signadou Campus in Watson, for printing this Newsletter as a community service.*

MESSAGE FROM THE WCA CHAIR

The WCA Annual General Meeting held on May 14 attracted a small audience. Our guest speaker briefed us on environmental law, followed by further presentations on the work done by our members in furthering WCA objectives in 2008, broad scale planning in Watson, and progress on Justice Robert Hope Park.

We are pleased to announce the new WCA committee for 2009. The office bearers are:

Chair: Richard Larson

Vice-Chair: Liz Grace

Honorary Secretary: Julie Smith

Treasurer: Jon Real

The ordinary committee members are:

Carrie Wright

Gillian Helyar

Chris Nailer

Theresa Rowan

Matthew Needham

Congratulations to the new committee, and thanks to the 2008 committee for your contributions last year.

Richard Larson, Chair

OBJECTS OF THE WATSON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

For those who are relatively new to Watson, the aims of the Association are set in our Constitution and are to:

- a. promote, protect and enhance the social, cultural and physical environment of the community of Watson;
- b. promote the welfare, community spirit and quality of life of residents of Watson;
- c. raise funds and expend them in the pursuit of the other objects of the Association;
- d. inform the community about issues concerning Watson;
- e. engage in any other activity conducive to attaining these objects.

The Association has a well-deserved reputation for community activism going back to the days of early self-government, and continues to lobby the community and our politicians to protect and enhance our way of life and our environment. Without the hard work of our former committee members, and support from residents and others, we might not have much of the amenity which is now taken for granted. Examples include:

- ◆ gazettal of the Stirling Avenue road reserve as urban open space;
- ◆ the saving of Justice Robert Hope Park, our beautiful 18ha patch of nationally endangered Yellow Box Red Gum grassy woodland;
- ◆ scrutiny of planning decisions made for north Watson, which has hopefully led to better outcomes.

Many of the people involved in voluntary work are still active in the Association, but they are getting older, weary and battle-hardened. It is difficult to engage politically without knowledge of the legislation and processes which drive planning in Watson and the ACT. In previous issues of the *Watson* we have highlighted traffic and the continuing densification of our suburb triggering major concerns.

It is vitally important that we receive feedback and input from our community. Please consider contributing to material for our newsletter.

Majura Primary on track with grand plan

You may have noticed that the space around Majura Primary School has been undergoing something of a radical makeover in recent months. Of the five zones identified in the master plan it is the front and Irvine Street sections which have received the most attention.

Principal Coralie McAlister says the new native plantings were designed as a natural extension of Mt Majura. “We had a planting day when 90 people came down to do the front garden,” she says. The bike racks have also been moved to the front, while a simple competition was held to design the gates as functional public artworks.

“Why just have any gate, we asked – why not have a creative gate?” says Coralie. The children now put in their bikes through the flower gate (paid for by the P&C) and take them out through the mountain gate. “When the gates were put in, members of the community passing by really started to understand what we were trying to do.”

Community and connectedness are words which come up often. This is not surprising given that the master plan is the result of extensive consultation with the wider community and the unusually high level of parental involvement at Majura Primary.



*Majura Primary School
Principal
Coralie
McAlister*

The ten chooks in the environment courtyard are a particular favourite with the kids. “The kids love them,” Coralie says. “They have a meaningful reason to collect their food scraps and to recycle.” The eggs produced are sold each Wednesday morning, but you have to be quick – demand far outstrips supply.

Work on the vegetable garden is also underway. A dedicated group of ‘compost kids’ and ‘energy savers’ lead the effort. A \$140,000 grant from the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program will fund new kitchen and dining areas, as well as a ‘gardening teacher’ to help the kids run the veggie patches. All food will be grown, prepared and consumed on-site.

But the pièce de resistance of recent developments must surely be the high-quality German-manufactured playground equipment. “We used to have about 30 kids playing in that area when I first arrived – we have about 120 kids on this playground now,” Coralie reports. “When I watch them, they’re fully engaged; it’s an absolute delight to see.”

The program of upgrades is by no means over, but Coralie is hopeful that the master plan will be fully implemented within the next 18 months. More than \$2 million from the federal government’s economic stimulus plan will certainly come in handy to finish the job.



Sam Durnell presents ‘Beautiful’ the hen while Josh Johnson tends to the other chooks.

AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE VILLAGE UPDATE

We believe that development of the Heritage Village site will trigger the operation of the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act), on the grounds that it will permit the removal of a portion of a critically endangered ecological community — that being Yellow Box-Red Gum grassy woodland. If the matter is not referred to the Commonwealth Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts by the developer or ACTPLA, the Watson Community Association will write a letter to Minister Garrett requesting that he call in the matter for referral.

The woodland is also protected under ACT legislation, where it is classified as endangered. Under the terms of a bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and the ACT (not yet formalised) if the matter was referred to the Commonwealth, and the removal of an endangered ecological community was deemed to be a controlled action (an action requiring approval by the Commonwealth minister), the environmental impact would be assessed by the ACT government through ACTPLA.

After assessment has been completed, the Commonwealth minister must decide whether or not to approve the proposed activity, and if it is approved, whether to impose conditions on the approval. If the minister were to recommend conditions for approval to proceed, the WCA would propose that an offset of equivalent land to support the Yellow Box-Red Gum grassy woodland be provided (e.g. as protected open public space) elsewhere in Watson as a condition. Such land exists east of Antill Street, opposite Justice Robert Hope Park. There are a lot of ifs in all this.

Lobbying for an offset can also be conducted as part of any environmental assessment of the Heritage Village site undertaken by the ACT Government; or independently, requiring broad community support. The WCA has argued for a dedicated environmental corridor connecting Justice Robert Hope Park with the Mt Majura Nature Reserve for several years. We consider that it is time to re-take action on this front. The process would involve a variation to the Territory Plan to change land use, an environment assessment, and ACT Legislative Assembly approval.

Satis satisfies

As I chat with Sher Ward in the new back courtyard of cafe Satis, the space is being decorated by a night-time city skyline and the beginnings of a soil-less garden. Sher says that she wants to keep her cafe small scale but is having to expand to cater for customer numbers.

“Originally I thought it might be just myself most of the day,” she says. “I was pretty overwhelmed when things did keep picking up.” These are impressive results for a business passionately committed to vegetarian and organic cuisine, which competes with three other eateries and relies exclusively on



word of mouth for its marketing.

Sher has been in the hospitality business since she was 12 years old and honed her skills at popular Tilley’s of Lyneham for over eight years. “I always wanted to open my own business – I just kept putting it off,” she says. Originally Sher

was going to do it in her homeland; as a Canadian Métis (a nation of mixed native and European ancestry) she was even eligible for a government grant.

In the end her choice of location was disarmingly logical: “My daughter goes to Majura Primary, I live up the road and I don’t know how to drive.” Sher is justifiably proud of her achievements. “We’ve created a real community space here. I now have people who come in every day. We get heaps of mothers’ groups – dads too.”

Satis will soon offer dinner three nights per week and live music on a more regular basis – all this to be ready by the time the warmer weather comes in September.

Watson Woodlands Working Group Update

Autumn has presented some very contrasting weather. We had a hot and dry March, a wet April and an extremely dry May. Thank goodness that some rain has fallen last month. Work on the woodlands has consisted of watering our newly planted trees, removal of herbaceous and woody weeds, a bit of fencing (erection and removal), and removal of debris caused by flooding along the Stirling Avenue urban corridor.



Guided tours of the park were given to Andy Westcott from the Molonglo Catchment Group and Sally McIntosh from ACT Parks Conservation and Lands. They were most impressed by the rabbit proof fence and the contrasting condition of the grasses inside and outside the fence. It does indicate the pressure being put on the ecosystem by rabbits and kangaroos. The grasses which were planted inside the fence (Themeda and Poa) are very healthy and some seeded the first year, which is very encouraging.

Tree losses from the spring planting have been minimal (5-10 out of 200 or so) and many have grown beyond the tree guards.

Fourth year Majura Primary students helped to plant 60 grass seedlings and did some tree watering in April. Kindergarten children also got some time out of school and helped with watering. Thanks to John Briggs, Keith & Gillian Helyar, Leise Baker, Shane Hetherington, Anthony Burgess, Karen Budnick, Helen Munro, and Richard Larson. The Working Group ably assisted by Majura Primary spent more than 160 hours on the reserve during autumn.

Contributions to THE WATZON are welcome. The next deadline for submitting ads and other contributions is 18 September 2009. Email: martin@mbwriting.com.au