**Woden Valley Uniting Church**

**Our approach to stewardship of the church’s land in Curtin**

(Block 1, Section 15, bordered by Carruthers, Theodore and Martin Streets)

**The original land grant**

The “block” was originally granted, as community facility land, to the Presbyterian Church in the 1960s for church use, but aside from a church manse was never built on. Instead, agreement was reached with the local Anglicans (Church of the Good Shepherd) to jointly develop the land they had been granted on the other side of the road. The Presbyterians built the hall complex (on land transferred by the Anglicans) and the Anglicans the church. Various alternative uses for the block (including youth club, aged care and childcare) have been considered over the years by the Presbyterian, Uniting and Anglican congregations but never to the point of finality, due mainly to finance and zoning limitations.

**MyHome in Canberra**

In 2013 MyHome in Canberra, a local community organisation which aims to provide supported accommodation to people with enduring mental illness, approached the church about possible use of the land. MyHome proposed to use the land to build a complex of twenty single bedroom apartments for people with mental illness. The congregation responded that same year by giving in-principle agreement to the request and then worked with the Presbytery and Synod levels within the Uniting Church to formalise an offer to MyHome about use of the land. In broad terms the offer makes part of the block available to MyHome subject to adequate capital funds being available and operational and financial feasibility being established.

MyHome’s proposed use of the land would provide no financial return to the Uniting Church. Yet we have persisted over these past eight years in our support for MyHome, both in terms of our offer of land and through the efforts of individual church members in the work of MyHome. We support MyHome because we believe that:

* housing for people with mental illness is an area of acute need in our city;
* HOME in Queanbeyan, on which the MyHome proposal is largely modelled, with strong local community support has for over 10 years been successfully providing supportive accommodation for people with enduring mental illness. We believe MyHome can be similarly successful in Curtin;
* the central location in Curtin and its proximity to shops and public transport makes the site a very suitable location for this type of accommodation. Moreover the 2018 Curtin Group Centre Master Plan encourages the development of supportive housing on the site; and
* this land has been underutilised for too long. The church wishes to see it put to use in a way that is beneficial to the community. MyHome’s proposal of housing for people with mental illness fits that purpose.

The church was affirmed in its support of MyHome by the inclusion in the 2020 ACT Parliamentary Agreement of a commitment to “work with the land owners and community organisations to deliver the MyHome proposal in Curtin.” We are working with the ACT Government and MyHome to achieve this end. More information about MyHome is at <https://myhomeincanberra.org.au/>

**Affordable Rented Housing**

The MyHome proposal would use only part of the block. The church is exploring with CHC, a local community and affordable housing provider, the use of the remainder of the block for affordable rented housing. (More information about CHC is <https://chcaustralia.com.au/> ) This is another type of housing much in need in the ACT. The 2020 Parliamentary Agreement includes an ambitious target for the provision of additional affordable rented housing over the next 4-5 years. The 2018 Curtin Master Plan recommends the investigation of our Curtin site for affordable housing.

The Uniting Church is attracted to the idea of affordable rented housing on the block. It would help meet a significant social need and would complement the MyHome development. At this stage, however, the church is just exploring options. We recognise that affordable rented housing is likely to require a Territory Plan variation and because of the rental concessions inherent in the model, affordable housing projects struggle to be economic. In our case the economic case would need to allow for a replacement of the church manse. We would also require some ongoing financial return both to compensate for costs and disruption that would inevitably stem from the development and because, as a church, we have mission priorities in addition to housing.

**Indicative Development Plan for the site and Engagement with the Local Community**

In May 2021 WVUC, with the support of MyHome and CHC, commissioned architectural and planning consultants to prepare an Indicative Development Plan for the site. The purpose of the Plan is to help determine the best location on the site for MyHome, to explore options for affordable housing on the remainder of the site and to provide a basis for community consultation with regard to the use of the site.

We recognise that the establishment of MyHome on the site, involving as it would 19 people with mental illness living in apartments near the centre of the suburb, will need to be carefully explained to the local community. Likewise, the local community will pay close attention to the possibility of an affordable rental housing development which rises perhaps as high as six storeys at the entry point of the suburb. We are keen to ensure that the community is well informed about our proposals and given ample opportunity to comment. We undertake to listen.

The 2018 Curtin Group Centre Master Plan made recommendations about the public spaces which are immediately adjacent to the site. These included recommendations for a pedestrian/cycle path along Martin Street and through parkland to the proposed tram stop on Yarra Glen; and an improved entry into the suburb from Yarra Glen along Carruthers Street to the shops. WVUC will seek to ensure that our proposals are consistent and sympathetic with the Curtin Master Plan.

If you have any queries or comments about any of the above you can contact WVUC at secretary.wvuc@gmail.com