

**WATSON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION TO STANDING  
COMMITTEE FOR PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT**  
*Draft Variation to the Territory Plan No.261 – Part Blocks 2 and 3 and Block 5  
Section 75 Watson – Changes to Commercial CZ6 and Accommodation  
Zone*

This submission seeks to present a case for preservation of the land noted in the draft variation in its current Commercial CZ6 and Accommodation Zone.

## **INTRODUCTION**

There have been three versions of Draft Variation No.261 to the Territory Plan. The first (unpublished) version of the Draft Variation was aborted in January 2006. A second version of the variation was publicly notified in October 2007, and submissions were solicited as part of the public consultation process. Over 400 submissions were received. None were in favour of changing the land use. The third version of the variation was issued in May 2008. The substantive change with the third draft variation is to re-issue the draft variation under the new *Planning and Development Act 2007*.

### **1. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE VARIATION**

A proponent (the Village Building Company) met with representatives of the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA) in April 2004 to discuss a proposal for residential land use of the Heritage Village site. ACTPLA advised the proponent that it would need to prepare a series of studies to demonstrate the appropriateness of the proposal, given that it did not appear to be inconsistent with the Spatial Plan.

The Acting Minister for Planning agreed to ACTPLA advising the proponents to prepare a Planning Study in accordance with the Planning Study Guidelines before consideration is given to a Territory Plan variation for Block 3 Section 75 Watson to change the land use policy to allow for residential uses. The correspondence (in the form of a Brief) was signed by the Acting Minister for Planning on the 20<sup>th</sup> July 2004.

Reading from this, four years have transpired since the Brief was signed by the Acting Minister for Planning and the latest re-issuing of Draft Variation No.261. Throughout this extraordinary period of time, consultations and discussions have continued between the proponent, the Minister for Planning, ACTPLA and the ACT Land and Development Agency (LDA). The LDA was chiefly involved in processes dealing with processes involving a direct sale of land (Part Block 2, Section 75), and infrastructure matters which would have to be dealt with at a future Development Application stage.

During these four years, the lessee of Block 3 Section 75 has incrementally ceased sub-letting of the buildings on the site. It is noted that the motel and the service station have long-term leases. The lessee has also reduced general maintenance on the site. The ACT Government and some in the wider community maintain that the site is derelict and uneconomic to operate in its current state. What is not discussed is that there is a cause and effect relationship. Any deterioration in site infrastructure is clearly a breach of lease conditions. The question of whether the site in its current condition is economically viable does not mean that a change in land use is necessary, or in the public interest.

## 1. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Public consultation leading up to the notification of the Draft Variation in October 2007 has clearly been inadequate.

- July 30 2007. The proponent was asked to contact the Australian Heritage Village Action Committee in a letter written by the Chief Planning Executive (ACTPLA).
- October 10 2007. The Watson Community Association met with representatives of the Village Building Company (VBC). VBC agreed to email a copy of their Planning Study.
- October 12 2007. DV261 was given interim effect for a maximum period of 1 year.
- November 26 2007. Deadline for written comments from the public to the draft variation.

This is completely outrageous. The Watson Community Association was effectively given one month to study and comment on a proposal which was in the pipeline for over three years.

## 2. LAND USES IN NORTH WATSON

Variation No.5 to the Territory Plan, the predecessor to DV No.261, specifically excluded land east of Antill Street for residential use. It set a projected limit on population to 1300. There are in the vicinity of 400 new dwellings erected in North Watson on the land specified in Variation 5.

Furthermore most of the land which was the subject of Variation 5 was designated as 'Defined Land' (Future Urban Area) or has an 8K overlay which allows for residential land use (see Figure 1). An aerial photograph showing the Heritage Village site is included as Figure 2.

The land which is the subject of Draft Variation 261 does not allow for residential land use. Sections 84, 85 and 86 do not allow residential land use. Two television studios are incompatible with residential land use.

North Watson land is clearly very valuable in higher land uses. Accordingly, the ACT Government and its agencies appear to be of the view that it is too valuable for community facilities and recreational purposes.

There are over 400 residents of North Canberra who oppose the use of Part Blocks 2 and 3, Section 75 Watson, which includes the Australian Heritage Village, for residential purposes.

We wish to have local community and recreational facilities on this land. Watson, once fully developed, will be one of the most populous suburbs in Canberra, with over 5000 residents. There is no community hall or public meeting space (picnic area) in Watson. We urge the ACT Government to resume Block 3 for and use the land and its infrastructure for community and recreational facilities. We shouldn't have to travel long distances to the Kenny Group Centre, or elsewhere in Canberra, to access basic community and recreational facilities. There will be substantial equivalent replacement costs if the Heritage Village is bulldozed down. Both North Canberra and the future residents of Gunghalin will be deprived of community and recreational facilities for many years if this draft variation goes ahead.

There is another aside: we will continue to voice our concerns on this matter, and we do vote.

Richard Larson

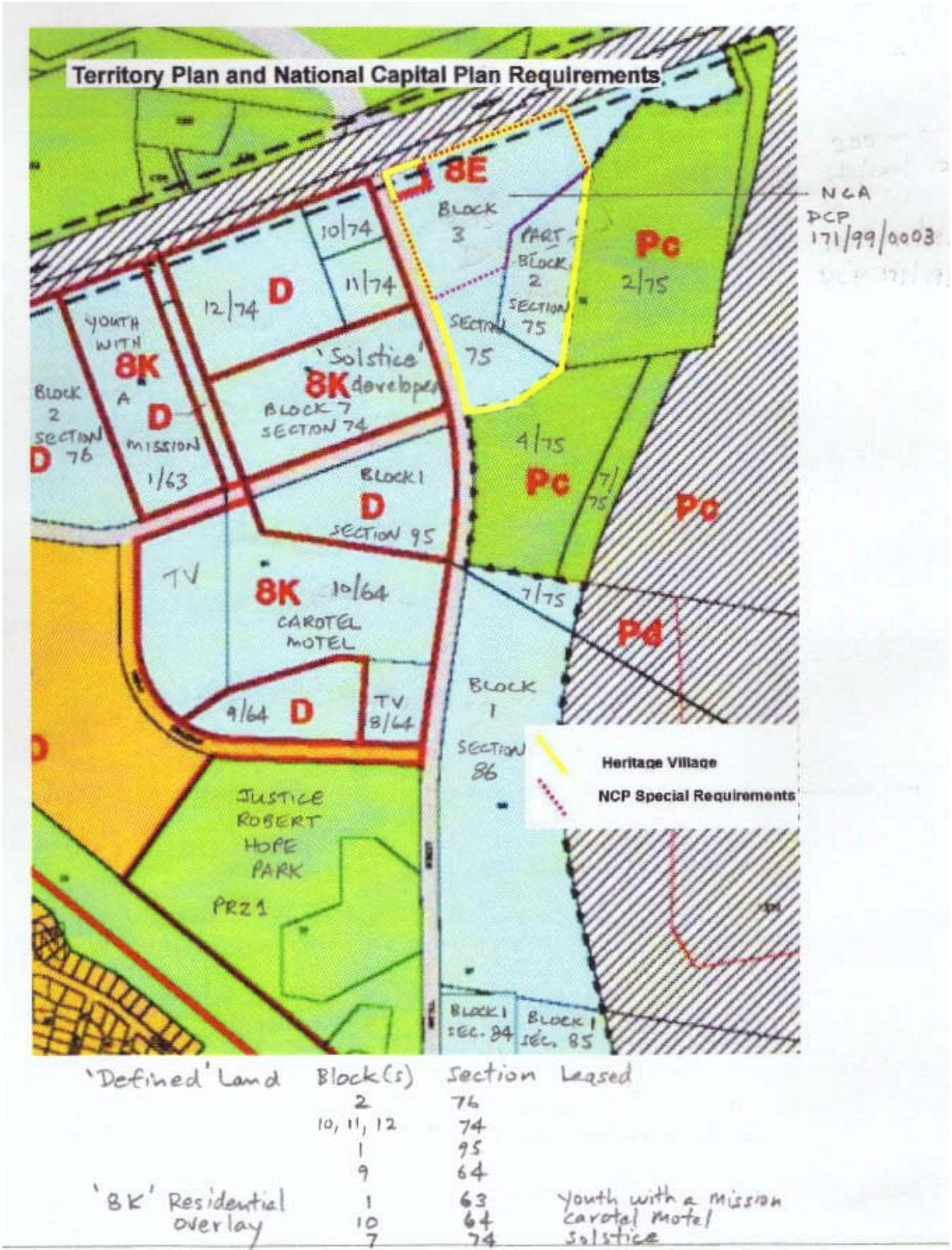


Figure 1: Territory Plan extracted from the *Affordable Housing Planning Study*, p. 12, February 2007, p12, The Village Building Co., annotated in pencil by the Watson Community Association

