

Italo Club Forrest site for sale but community spirit to live on

Canberra Times June 28, 2015 **Meredith Clisby**

The Forrest land which is home to the Italo Australian Club has been put on the market following the ACT government's decision to change lease conditions for the site.

Italo Club board president Angelo Damiano says the club is there to stay but will likely become a boutique offering as part of a new plaza and integrated community centre.

Under the removal of the concessional status of the lease the land on Franklin Street can be redeveloped but a lease exists that protects the club's short-term future on the site.

There are plans for the club to eventually move to the site next door but it would depend on the outcome of the sales process, Mr Damiano said.

The land at 78 Franklin Street in Forrest is being offered for sale as an "inner south redevelopment site" with the opportunity to create a landmark development.

The site is currently zoned for club use but could be developed for residential or commercial uses if changes are approved.

Expressions of interest for the 5450 square metre block close on Tuesday, July 21.

The ACT government approved an application by the club and the Council of Italo-Australian Organisations to remove the concessional status of the existing crown leases last year.

While the change applies to the land next to the club site, which is home to the Italian community centre, this block is not part of the sales process.

Mr Damiano, who became the new board president last week, said the club was pushing on with plans it had begun five years ago when it was in a terrible financial position.

He said the financial problems had been arrested now and plans were progressing for an integrated community centre and club on the site next door.

"We'd like to get some sort of piazza and fountain out there and make it like a traditional Italian square," Mr Damiano said.

"The club's going to survive and still be vibrant, it may not be as big as this, but we're still going to have some sort of a presence in a fairly strong financial position."

It would be "a slice of Italy in the middle of Canberra".

Mr Damiano said changes in the short term included the popular Italian eatery Tosolini's opening up at the club this week.

Former Italo Club board president Claudio Ciuffetelli said at the time the application had been lodged with the government that the club had to take action if it was to survive following years of financial turmoil.

Documents with the application showed the club never recovered from the cost of major extensions in the 1980s.

It faced a "triad of pressures" in the past 15 years including ACT government policies to do with smoking regulations, higher poker machine taxes, a changing demographic profile of club users and "unfocused management".

The Italo Australian Club is just one of the community clubs in the ACT to apply for the removal of the concessional status of the lease in order to diversify revenue streams.

In several cases, such as in the Canberra Raiders' plans for the closed Braddon Club site, this has led to plans for residential developments.