



**'We may remain pure and we may remain activists, but we will not retain control of this site'**

Councillors Jane Garrett and Josh Funder

Open land on the east side of the site

council had worked extensively with resident groups to draft "design and development principles" for the site – a detailed 12-page "vision" for future development.

Yarra also established a taskforce of community, government planning and council representatives, charged with promoting discussion about the sale and its implications.

Mayor Amanda Stone says Amcor provides a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to showcase inner-city sustainable living".

"We are passionate about seeing our community continue to be involved in realising the shared vision for their neighbourhood."

But as the consultation process unfolded, Amcor management suddenly fast-tracked the sale, announcing on February 25 the site would be put on the market immediately. The decision sent shockwaves through the council.

Phillips urged councillors – three Labor, three Greens, two independent and one Socialist – to consider the risks. Two-thirds of the site is zoned industrial, and the residential section – now open space – could be developed or fragmented into smaller independent titles once sold.

One option is for the council to rezone the entire site for residential or mixed use before the sale. But there is a catch. For the site to be rezoned before the April 16 developer deadline, the council would not have enough time to place the rezoning on public notice.

It would instead fall to the planning minister

to rezone the site, which would remove formal resident appeal rights to future developments.

If the council does nothing it risks unwanted development – what many are calling in verbal shorthand, "a DFO on the Yarra".

There is also the spectre of new planning laws, announced by Premier John Brumby in February, which give Madden the power to call in any project of state significance.

**At an emergency** meeting on March 20, councillors voted to buy more time and give the community a chance to consider the proposal.

A week later the Government's planning department made another offer: a planning overlay that would rezone the site for mixed use but provide for more community consultation.

The option was strongly supported by Richardson and Labor councillors, who believed immediate action was critical.

But the majority of councillors disagreed. Several accused the State Government of "holding a gun" to their heads and pressuring them to make decisions on the run.

Greens councillor Alison Clarke said the risk of industrial development on the site, or the site being broken up and sold in lots, was "pretty low" and "an acceptable risk".

Fellow Greens councillor Sam Gaylard agreed. "I believe there has been a gun to the head in this process. I'm concerned about the process,

(and) I'm concerned about the community."

Socialist councillor Steve Jolly said the Government's cabinet was "in ecstasy" at having a pro-jobs, pro-development proposal on its hands a year before the election, but the council "should let the community have a fair go first".

However, Labor councillor Jane Garrett said council inaction increased the risk of Madden calling the project in to state control.

"It is clear from tonight that some councillors want to do nothing, (but) it is highly likely the State Government will act if we don't act."

Her Labor colleague Josh Funder warned the council could only remain involved in negotiations if it rezoned the site. "We may remain pure and we may remain activists, but we will not retain control of this site."

Six of the nine councillors voted to continue consulting the community and to refrain from asking the minister to intervene.

But the council appears to be at odds with one of the community groups heavily involved in the Amcor process.

Two weeks ago, before the council meeting, the Alphington Paper Mill Action Group resolved to support rezoning the site before its sale and asking Madden to get involved.

APMAG member Jeff Katz says it would be dangerous to wait until Amcor is sold to protect the site. "I think generally, we wouldn't like to take the risk," Katz says.

"It's hard to change the conditions after the sale because you then face potential lawsuits from developers for changing the goal posts."

**The debate has** taken a toll on all involved. In his monthly council report emailed to supporters, Jolly alleged ALP members had "bullied" community members over Amcor.

"During the six days from Friday (March 20) to last night's meeting, the usual pressure was brought to bear on councillors from the state government and their ALP props in the area," Jolly wrote.

"More sinisterly this pressure was for the first time also brought to bear on individual residents. This will not be tolerated and those people behind the bullying will be exposed in the not to (sic) distant future."

However, Jolly later declined to name the perpetrators of the bullying, what form it might have taken or the victims, saying only his statement was "not a rhetorical flourish".

Of the allegations, mayor Amanda Stone will only say that emotions are high, which reflects the "level of stress and anxiety" over the project. But she remains confident in Yarra's ability to manage the site.

"We made the judgement that our planning processes that we had in place were adequate," she says.

The only question is whether the State Government will agree.