

Is the new Liebig St working, or not?



Liebig St was in desperate need of an upgrade, but is the lack of free parking killing the CBD?

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

There was no doubt that Warrnambool's grotty, rundown old Liebig St needed a serious makeover, but is the \$18 million upgrade being stuffed up by a lack of free parking?

Almost 3000 people who physically signed a petition for the return of central, 90-minute free parking say it is.

The 2833 signature petition – no small number – was tabled at the Warrnambool City Council meeting last Monday but barely raised a mention because of the much bigger news story that night – racehorse training on Levy's beach.

The petition is pushing for permanent, 90-minute free parking in Parker's Carpark (behind the Commonwealth Bank) and the Ozone carpark (behind the new post office) and was gathered by long-term CBD trader Max Taylor, from Taylor's clothing and surf store, which has been trading in Liebig St for decades.

Max pulls no punches in the three page-document (see images at end of story) he added to the petition.

"Potential shoppers have left the CBD in their multitudes", he says, because of damaging combination of expensive parking, confusing meters and lack of meters (only 10 in the whole street) that leave people worried they will be fined \$68 for overstaying.

Some traders around Parker's carpark, he says, **have experienced a 20-30% loss in trade** compared to when the 90-minute free carparking was in place during the street works.

And there **are still 24 empty shops** between Raglan Parade and Timor St (we won't go into how many others sit empty along Lava and Timor).

Max also accuses the council Director City Infrastructure, Scott Cavanagh, of making misleading claims to the local newspaper about the number of shoppers parking in the CBD. The 5000-6000 people who parked every day included a lot of city workers, Max claims, thereby "grossly overestimating the number of shoppers".

He also points out that local traders around the Parker and Ozone carparks paid a special levied back in 1984 to build the new FREE off-street carparks in Parker Arcade and the Ozone. Meters were added in 2004.



Stormy weather: navigating the roundabouts in Liebig St can mean a lot of stopping and starting.

A lot has changed since 2004. Online shopping arrived. More shopping centres have been built on the fringe of Warrnambool, offering more than 2000 free car parking spaces.

And then there are the new, pedestrian friendly crossings in and around Liebig St which are so pedestrian friendly that drivers potentially have to brake before they get to the roundabout, in the roundabout, and leaving the roundabout.

My personal favourite is driving from Liebig St down Lava St, past the Centrelink, where you give way to pedestrians coming into *and* leaving the roundabout, then cross an ugly road hump, give way to buses leaving the bus zone and roll up to another pedestrian crossing – all within 50 metres.

I am all for slower traffic, but that really is ridiculous...and messy.

Maybe we just need more time to get used to it. Maybe we can all download the app and pay for parking that way.

Or maybe, as Max fears, people will avoid Liebig St unless it is absolutely necessary and shop somewhere else. For our long-suffering, high rent paying traders, that would be the

worst scenario.

It is worth mentioning, as Max does, Port Fairy has no parking meters and seven-day trading. The little town won yet another award for being the most popular among tourists.

They just might be on to something over there.

Max's petition, as per standard council procedure, sits on the table for 30 days and will be discussed at the next council meeting.

To the Mayor and Councillors,	Ref No
	Officer
	Scanned Yes / No Ch:

We the following undersigned businesses and ratepayers strongly support this petition to introduce free 90-minute car parking everlasting in Parkers and Ozone car parks.

These two car parks were both paid for by the surrounding businesses in these 2 blocks by a separate rating scheme to provide FREE CAR PARKING to the shoppers of the Warrnambool CBD. The Warrnambool Council back in May 1984 agreed to levy the surrounding businesses of Parkers car park a separate rate in accordance with the local government act, the first instalment due for payment by 31st December 1984.

It was very clear that when the businesses agreed to this rating scheme that the car parks were to be a free time limit. This was evidenced by the Town Clerk Mr Vern Robson in his eulogy to the then City Engineer Mr Don Cooper, reported in the Warrnambool Standard on Thursday 12th January 2016, that the car parks were to be definitely FREE! Why would the surrounding businesses of Parkers and Ozone car parks agree to pay a rating scheme that would bring in substantial parking fees and fines revenue to Council finances?

What happened after the car parks were completed was that the surrounding staff cars utilised these car parks and when the Council traffic officers chalked their tyres, the car owners all moved their cars after they were chalked. Thus the Council was powerless to remove these staff cars, as evidenced back then, by when you arrived at work; the car park was 80% full at 9am in the morning with no one in the shops. This situation defeated the purpose of providing a free car park to CBD shoppers when staff occupied a major portion of them.

A request to Council back in 2004 was made to introduce car parking metres to remove the staff cars and as soon as this happened the staff cars disappeared. Computerised car parking ticket machines that could print out a free 90-minute ticket to shoppers was not heard of back then. Needless to say, the two car parks were FREE for approximately 20 years after construction. The situation has changed dramatically now with the new high technology computerised parking ticket machines installed all over the CBD that can be programmed to print out free 90- minute car parking tickets as evidenced by the outstanding success as trialled in Parkers car park in 2017 and Ozone car park in 2018.

Also we think it is fair to let Councillors know that when the Kmart development, with 335 free car parks applied for permit to build the project in the 1980's, it was appealed against by a group of central city business men on the grounds that the Warrnambool retail market was not big enough to support two separate retail areas, whilst agreeing with the creation of a complimentary area for standard highway business. Their appeal was dismissed and then this has led to unrestricted out-of-town development together with unlimited free car parks made available. This excessive and unrestricted development out of town has led to immense dejection and weakening of the CBD which justified the business men's appeal and now the council is spending big money on trying to make the CBD more attractive. This is exactly what has happened as there are now approximately 2200 free car parks for out of town shoppers as compared to (435) in the CBD.

The result of the all the above is that potential shoppers have left the CBD in their multitudes, vowing never to return after being fined \$68 for exceeding their time limit and secondly they are wearied and exhausted of rushing back to their cars to avoid being fined. The current car parking is totally unjust and unequitable to the CBD in favour of unrestricted out of town developments and no amount of renewal expenditure will amend the problem without getting the basic free 90-minute parking in the CBD as early as possible.

The CBD must have some provision for free car parking in Parkers and Ozone car parks, to be utilised as free 90-minute parking to attract thousands of shoppers back that have left the CBD. Parkers and Ozone car parks were NEVER intended to be built as Council revenue producers and as soon as the car parks are returned to their original purpose of free car parking the better for everyone concerned in Warrnambool and businesses connected with the CBD.

During the Liebig Street renewal, thousands of shoppers left the CBD because of street disruption and found alternative ways to shop. Then to entice shoppers back to the CBD, they have been confronted with

1. New high info technology parking ticket machines installed last December that only half the population understand how to use
2. More traffic disruption at roundabouts when cars have to stop illegally in the roundabout to give way to pedestrians
3. Less car parking spaces in Liebig Street
4. Increased parking meter fees that were effective from July 2017
5. Considerably less ticket machines than before the renewal. There is now only 5 machines on both sides [10 in total] from Raglan Parade to Timor Street.

The end product of the Liebig Street renewal is commendable, but many people are now questioning whether the \$15 million spent on it has been worthwhile because of the current situation. There has been false and misleading information by Council executives regarding this situation in particular by Scott Kavanagh in the Warrnambool Standard on Friday 15th June 2018. When the paper headlines said Warrnambool City Council is set to make \$1.2 million from new parking meters this year. Mr. Kavanagh has stated around 5000 to 6000 sessions are paid daily with the new meters. What Mr. Kavanagh failed to mention is that quite a percentage of these sessions are paid daily by CBD staff car workers, who utilise these machines every day, therefore grossly overestimating the number of shoppers who use these machines.

Many businesses have experienced difficult times over the past 2 years which has resulted in less staff being employed and lower property values. There remain 24 empty shops in Liebig Street from Raglan Parade to Timor Street. It was a sad case when Thomas Jewellers failed to sell at auction in December 2017. Even though the property sold at a later date, the store remains empty. Some businesses surrounding Parkers car park are currently experiencing 20% - 30% downturns this year compared to last year when the car park was 90 minutes free.

Warrnambool has so much untapped and immense potential that the future of the CBD is in your hands to bring life and people back by providing free 90-minute car parking in these 2

car parks. Locals have to love the place and tourists buy an experience, but this will not happen under the current situation. It is a well-known fact that country towns that are prospering are the ones providing some form of free car parking. In particular, we all hear how good Port Fairy is, simply because it does not have car parking ticket machines and it trades 7 days.

Let's make the Warrnambool CBD a happy and enjoyable place to shop and to buy a memorable experience by providing free-90 minute car parking where they should be.

To the Mayor and Councillors,

We the following undersigned businesses and citizens strongly support this petition to introduce free 90 -minute car parking everlasting in Parkers and Ozone car parks. To be only signed once and signatories must be 18 years and over.

If you would like to see The Terrier keep digging up, sniffing out and chewing on local issues, please make a small contribution below.

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