

Veteran W'bool City Councillor Neoh falls foul of local laws



An aerial shot of Warrnambool City Councillor Michael Neoh's family business, Penang Alley, shortly before it opened last December. Image via Penang Alley Facebook Page.

Carol Altmann – The Terrier

You would think after a whopping 16 years as a Warrnambool City councillor that Cr Michael Neoh would know local rules and regulations inside and out, but it seems he has had something of a brain fade around his own family business.

That business is the [Penang Alley restaurant](#) at the back of Cr Neoh's property on lower Liebig St, which opened on Boxing Day and has since operated without a mandatory grease trap, and an illegal back deck that fails to meet building standards.

Whoops!

How did that happen?

Well, part of it seems to be that Penang Alley mysteriously morphed from a 'pop up' to 'permanent'.

When the fake grass and house brick pillars were being installed for the 'pop up' last November, I was contacted by competitors who were mightily miffed that a city councillor would set up a temporary cafe to catch the summer trade, when they had slogged it out all winter.

Would Cr Neoh need to install an expensive Wannon Water compliant grease trap like the rest of them, they asked?

And did all of the furnishings meet safety standards?

And how about the wooden deck tacked on to the back? Was it legal?

So many questions and, at the time, so few answers, in fact Cr Neoh – at that time – was also mightily miffed...at being asked to explain:

"The business will meet all the necessary requirements for the classified business," was his only comment to me, via email.

That was in November.

Penang Alley 檳城小巷

hawker kitchen



Penang Alley is still there and, as it turns out, it has not met “all the necessary requirements”.

Finding this out has not been easy and has taken months of questions to the council by myself and [the Warrnambool Ratepayers' Association](#) who, I discovered earlier this year, was also on the case.

The WRA finally got some answers, where I got none.

After two months of waiting, I was pretty much told by the council to contact the WRA and ask them for the responses.

(Around and around we go...)

The upshot to all of this pesky persistence, however, is that it was finally confirmed that a 600mm grease trap to catch all the crap was compulsory – there wasn't one – and the timber back deck – used by the public all summer – didn't meet building standards.

In a word, it was illegal.

(Furnishings, surprisingly, don't have to meet any health guidelines, other than being clean.)

The council told the WRA that these issues are being fixed.

But how did Cr Neoh, who has been on council since George W Bush was President of the United States, not know he was cutting corners?

And more the point, how did he get away with it?



Warrnambool City Councillor Mike Neoh's blog page on Facebook: he was first elected in 2004.

Penang Alley is within a shoe toss of the council headquarters and fellow councillors (and most likely council staff) have hung out there.

I wouldn't get away with it – I get WCC notices in the mail saying that I have 10 days to trim my garden bushes that have crept over the fence or the council will come and do it for me at my expense! Take that, daisy bush!

And you, most likely, wouldn't get away with it either.

And this, let's be honest, is what grates the most: the double standards, the two sets of rules, the sense that who you are determines what action is taken, or how fast it happens.

Nobody has an issue with a councillor opening a funky little

eatery – go for it – but no wonder it has upset those who were forced to spend time and money doing the right thing from day one.

Yep, that's enough to give anyone a bad case of entitlement indigestion.

I offered Cr Neoh another right of reply before running this piece. He has not taken it up.

I am tip toeing back into the Tip Jar. If you would like to see The Terrier keep digging, please throw what is affordable into the tip jar below.

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