

Community vision needs to extend city wide

Description



The imminent sale – and at least partial demolition – of the former Sandilands Hotel/Maddens Lawyers building in W’bool is expected to pave the way for new apartments in the CBD.

OPINION – JULIE EAGLES

A vision without a task is but a dream. A task without a vision is drudgery. But a vision and a task are the hope of the world. – Church in Sussex England, 1730.

[quote]

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]n 2008, over several months, a great process of community consultation involving hundreds of people developed a community vision for the Warrnambool CBD called the [Warrnambool City Centre Structure Plan](#). The vision was for an ‘*alive, thriving, culturally rich city heart.*’

We not only developed a community vision for the CBD, but also community values, community goals, preferred development scenarios and five future directions with strategic objectives – in other words – amazingly, we came up with a detailed framework to work towards achieving our community vision!

The people who facilitated this process were incredibly skilled and experienced. The process was fun, creative and interesting and there were lots of ways to participate.

Perhaps most amazingly – because I had never experienced it in Warrnambool before – was the ongoing and detailed feedback and updates to participants and to the whole community throughout the process.

It was, to quote **Tanya Egan**, (The Warrnambool City Council's Business Support Manager) "the most exhaustive public planning process ever undertaken by Warrnambool City Council.....in collaboration with the community."

It was developed in response to a recognition that people were often "frustrated in the past because they hadn't been asked for input from the beginning" – underpinned by the principle "that if a community is to own the plans that will shape their future, then it has to participate in developing them from the outset – not somewhere along the way."

Very big tick.



The series of W'bool laneway events, like this print workshop run by South-West TAFE Creative Arts students, show what can happen when a community works together.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap] felt very satisfied with that visioning and planning process six years ago. I am sure I'm not alone, however, in being frustrated that nothing much seemed to happen for a long time afterwards. Or was it that the communication lines seemed to falter and then stop?

After all, we've had the wonderful Lighthouse theatre re-development and then the fantastic laneways festival led by [The F Project](#) and supported by Council.

Most recently, in the past month, there's been a follow up, and by all accounts also a very good, community planning process that honed in on re-designing the streetscape for two blocks of Liebig St stretching from Koroit St to Raglan Pde.

This time I chose not to take part, but I'm glad lots of other people did. I couldn't quite understand how this process linked to what we'd done six years ago and so either the communication didn't convey this clearly enough or I missed it.

It could be that I was just not that interested in redesigning two blocks of Liebig St – we don't all have to be involved in every plan!



The campaign to Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens grew from concerns about the loss of iconic buildings and structures in Warrnambool.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"] I [/dropcap]n 2009, just after the community visioning process for the CBD, I joined the council's **City Development Advisory Committee** where we received lots of information and requests for our input into all sorts of plans.

All of these plans were important at various levels, but I got lost in the detail and I couldn't see the guiding vision and values that held them all together: I was interested in seeing the community vision, values and goals that guided all of these plans.

And this is what I would still love to see and what I think we really need: a community vision that inspires, guides and drives all our plans for development in Warrnambool (and our town centres of Woodford, Dennington and Allansford).

A community strategic plan, a city wide structure plan... whatever 'planning speak' might label it.

Developing a city-wide community vision is about shaping our future within the context of the changing and challenging global, national, regional and local worlds in which we exist. The people who ran the CBD visioning process six years ago understood this.

One of the questions they asked was – what are the external trends and issues affecting the City Centre today that may influence the future? The facilitators believed that within any community all the skills, knowledge, passion and capacity necessary to progress already exist.

They were guided by a set of principles for “helping groups move from uncertainty to purpose.”

These include that:

- Council is part of the broader community team and not the fount of all knowledge and power.
- Council’s role is to show leadership by bringing people together in an environment where everyone feels secure about sharing their hopes, aspirations and views and that, in a safe space, people will focus on common ground, not on difference.
- For things to happen, Council must work collaboratively with all the players in that complex network of organisations and individuals that make the community function every day.

I was always thinking during that process – wouldn’t it be great if we were doing this not just for the CBD, but for the whole of our city!



A revamp of the northern end of Liebig St is the first major project to grow from the community driven CBD plan developed six years ago.

[dropcap style="color: #a02f2f;"]A [dropcap] city wide visioning process would allow community debate and discussion about our strengths and what we think are the key issues and challenges facing our city now and in the future.

It would allow us to talk about our aspirations and dreams and what we most value about our community and our natural and built environments. To talk about what give us our sense of place and belonging? What do we want to preserve, what do we want to create, what do we want to change?

Community visioning projects are now fairly commonplace across municipalities around Australia (and the world). The community visioning process for the CBD, that began 6 years ago, deserves to be replicated to a city wide plan.

In many ways, we can't afford not to do this.

As somebody said to me recently "if you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up anywhere."

[box] **Julie Eagles has been a leader of the Warrnambool Planning and Heritage Group (WPHG) since 2006. [‘Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher’s Gardens’](#) campaign is an offshoot of WPHG and their work to highlight issues that contribute to demolition by neglect of important heritage places.**[/box]

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