

A little less conversation, a little more action



How to improve the CBD: offer financial incentives for property owners to paint the glorious shop tops along Timor St.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] W
[/dropcap]hat is this inertia that appears to be holding Warrnambool in an iron-like grip and preventing this beautiful city from reaching its full potential?

It was with a heavy heart that I read respected lawyer **Roy Reekie's** recent letter to the local paper, lamenting that he had returned to Warrnambool after five years to find the Warrnambool City Council locked in a petty, schoolyard stand-off and he pondered if he had made a mistake in coming home.

A mistake! What an indictment: intelligent, energetic people like Roy should feel delighted to be back, not disappointed.



How to improve the CBD: paint a mural on the hideous Koroit St toilet block and, later, close it down. Relocate the bus transit to the old Post Office area.

I don't regret coming home after more than 20 years, but I, too, have been astounded by how the city appears to have lost its way. There is endless talk – usually accompanied by endless reports – about what could and should be done to revive the CBD, but there is no over-arching vision or leadership to actually make it happen.

Instead, our new-old Mayor wants us to be excited by new housing developments – projects that extend out into the country and make it even more critical to retain a vibrant city centre, or we will end up like the 'doughnut' regional cities of the US, where everybody lives in the 'burbs and shops in malls and the city heart is left for dead.

It is my fear that Warrnambool is at a critical juncture where, unless it gets its act together, we are at risk of that happening. We will have a city centre full of "services", but no heart.



How to improve the CBD: offer up high-profile but ugly walls, like this eyesore, to public art.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] I [dropcap] recently lived near a city like that: Morwell, in Gippsland. It was once a vibrant 'SEC town', but once the power companies were privatised, the jobs went and so did the families who shopped, ate and socialised in the town. It now relies on being a "service" centre, full of bland state and federal government offices providing health, welfare and social support services.

Morwell's main street is full of empty, dusty shops that were once restaurants, clothing stores, jewellers, butchers, bakers and newsagencies, some of which have moved out to the MidValley Shopping Centre – halfway between Morwell and Traralgon – because that's where people now linger. Does this sound familiar?

Warrnambool, however, has a huge advantage over a place like

Morwell and that is tourism. People flock to see the whales, and the beaches, and even good old Flagstaff Hill, but the CBD is letting us down, badly.

We have some of the most gorgeous and historic buildings in Victoria, but you wouldn't know it. We have an incredible, vibrant arts scene, but – judging by the lack of public art – you wouldn't know it. We have a deep and important indigenous history right around this area, but you wouldn't know it.

I walked around the entire CBD last week and did not see one bit of indigenous public art and only a handful of public art. Perhaps I was looking in the wrong places.



How to improve the CBD: stop patching and start paving. Especially on high-profile corners like this one.

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[/dropcap]hat I did see were many empty, dusty shops; dirty
and stained bitumen pavements that had been patched and

repatched to the point of being unsafe; a dark toilet block and a noisy bus transit zone dominating the hub of Liebig and Koroit streets; and, as always, pedestrians trying to skip between cars at intersections and being grateful when somebody stopped to let them pass.

And it appears that when some people DO try and make a difference, they are blocked at every turn. Take, for example, the artist who tried to open a pop-up market in an empty shop but was unable to find anyone (among the 20 or so people who apparently, between them, own the CBD) who would take it on. They would rather leave their shop empty. (What a contrast to [Revive Newcastle](#), where property owners actively encourage such ideas.)

And so the inertia continues...and more reports are written (*another* Liebig St revival plan is next) and older reports gather dust (remember the 2010 report on revitalising the Warrnambool Railway Station precinct?) and everybody sighs and says, "that's just how it is here", while cities and towns like Bendigo, Castlemaine, Daylesford, Ballarat, Kyneton and even Birregurra, power ahead.

We deserve better leadership and this is Mayor Neoh's greatest challenge: to unite the council and business community around a common purpose and to actually **get things done**.



How to improve the CBD: free (timed) parking, bike lanes and a 40 kph speed limit between Lava and Timor Streets.



What CAN be done: for more examples

of creative street art click [here](#).

[learn_more caption="Ten ideas to improve the CBD, in some cases, almost instantly – click the arrow"]

1. All outdoor eating in Liebig St must use quality furniture – not cheap, plastic tables and chairs.
2. Paint a mural on the ugliest toilet block known to feature on a major intersection anywhere in Victoria...until you can close it down.
3. Relocate the bus transit area from Koroit St to outside the former Post Office Building in Timor St.
4. Provide financial support for all of the historic shop tops along Timor St to be repainted.
5. Repave all of the footpaths along Liebig St.
6. Free parking in the entire CBD, but with time restrictions enforced by local laws.
7. At least half a dozen bare and ugly walls around the CBD to be offered up for public art.
8. Ban all exposed skip bins.
9. Add bike lanes along Liebig St and reduce traffic speeds to 40 kph between Lava and Timor streets.
10. Cars entering roundabouts must give way to pedestrians.

Do you have anything to add?

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