



Opinionarticle

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Collaborative efforts to revitalise Central Geelong

On a recent visit to Canberra it was interesting to read in the local newspaper about issues in Canberra's city centre that were not unlike many of the issues we have been grappling with in relation to Central Geelong for some time, such as vacant shops and low numbers of residential inhabitants in the city. As well, issues relating to safety in the Little Malop Street Mall and surrounds have been brought into sharp focus with recently reported incidents of unruly and threatening behavior towards traders. As a city that has so much to be proud of, such incidents can have a disproportionate and negative impact on the way we view Geelong and how we perceive issues such as safety, especially in light of Victoria Police statistics that show crime in the mall has actually reduced.

Currently, two very important projects are proactively seeking to address these and other issues and to revitalize Geelong's city centre into a thriving and appealing hub. The Central Geelong Taskforce, initiated and led by the City of Greater Geelong, has developed the 15 year Central Geelong Action Plan providing a blueprint for revitalization of Central Geelong. The plan is the culmination of many influences, including the far-sighted Vision 2 project spearheaded by visionary thinker and former head of Architecture at Deakin University, Professor Hisham Elkadi, along with extensive community consultation and input. It provides a direct and action-orientated approach to resolving issues and making Central Geelong an attractive place for people to live, work and play and for investment, business and tourism. It is an ambitious, proactive plan that re-positions Central Geelong and should address all of the issues currently deemed to be 'problems'. The Geelong Chamber of Commerce has been actively involved in contributing to the plan through an extensive consultation process, with the Chamber representing the voice of business on the taskforce.

The second key project, focusing on the Little Malop Street Mall, is being spearheaded by the G21 Regional Justice Reference Group. A working group, comprising representatives from City of Greater Geelong, Victoria Police, G21 Geelong Region Alliance, youth and government agencies is working with the Minister for Police, the Hon Wade Noonan MP, to develop a long term strategy to address perceptions of safety in the mall. The Chamber has been closely involved in the consultation process and will take a lead role in engaging with traders, commencing with two forums to be held in May specifically targeted to traders with the objective of addressing safety and perception issues in the mall. The new plan for the mall includes such projects as the #SoYouKnowGeelong campaign, which aims to develop a range of key messages relating to socially acceptable behaviour. The plan to address issues in the mall has adopted a collaborative approach involving local government, business, community, youth agencies, Victoria Police, government agencies and key interest groups, all working together to develop strategies and implement positive change.

Whilst some of these changes will take time to implement, it is evident that there is a vast amount of positive energy and goodwill on tap to ensure the success of these two key projects. I look forward to one day walking down a Moorabool Street abuzz with commercial activity and bustling with the vitality of people living and working in Central Geelong; reflecting a cosmopolitan charm and lure that is the essence of Geelong in the not too distant future.



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