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Cairns business: Renewal project set to inject vibrancy into CBD

A bullseye has been drawn on dozens of vacant buildings as an ambitious new project looks to refill and reinvigorate the Cairns CBD.
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Bronwyn Farr

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 @bronwyn_farr  2 min read March 15, 2022 - 6:00AM The Cairns Post

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CREATIVE entrepreneurs and start-up businesses are being encouraged to set up shop in the heart of Cairns in a landmark project to revitalise the ailing CBD.

Not-for-profit Renew Australia has partnered with CBD landlords and Cairns Regional Council in a year-long project where artists and businesses can occupy vacant space on a rolling 30-day lease free of charge, with indemnity insurance from Renew Australia giving landlords peace of mind.



Renew Cairns project manager Phil Druery in an office space in Shields Street which will be used by the Golden Orb collective of artists. Picture: Brendan Radke

Renew Cairns has been launched with the first space in Shields St set to be occupied by an artistic collective under the banner Golden Orb, creating a gallery space.

Project manager Phil Druery said the retail vacancy rate in the CBD was 35 per cent to 40 per cent and for office space it was 18 per cent.

He has three premises on Shields St and one on the Esplanade so far – and 51 expressions of interest from those keen to get a foothold in the CBD.





Cairns Chamber of Commerce vice president Matthew Tickner last year compiled photographs of vacant retail spaces in a small area of the CBD along Lake St and in the Shields St pedestrian mall. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

“We’ve got really good quality spaces so far and when we had an inspection for 27 Shields St, about 45 came and they started talking to each other and networking about what they could do together,” Mr Druery said.

“They may be start-ups or they may be businesses that are established and might have an online presence or a garage, and they can create a presence in a shopfront.”

He said the aim was to enable people to build business capacity while revitalising the city.

“Certainly we don’t see ourselves as any [kind of solution to the CBD situation](#) but this type of activation is good for owners, because the lights come on, and agents and owners can bring people through the space,” Mr Druery said.





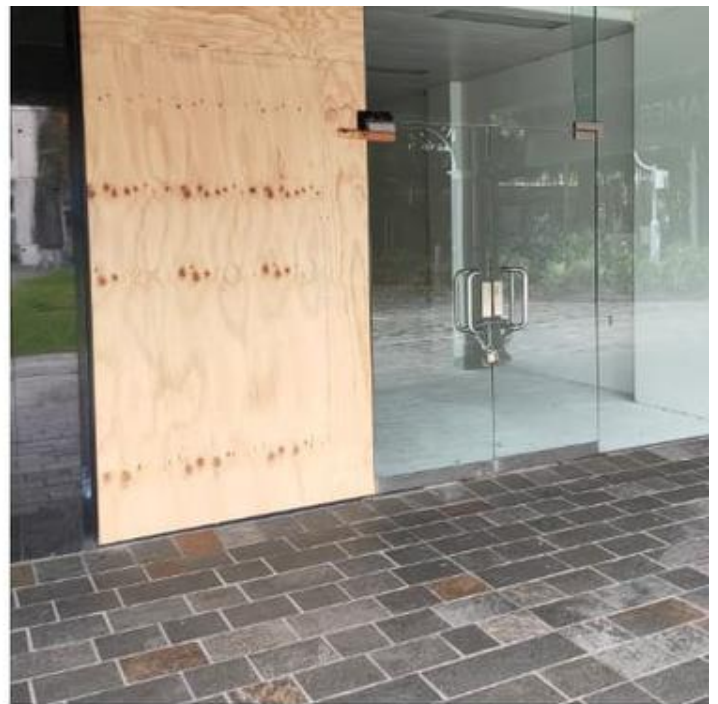
Vacant buildings have become an all-too familiar sight in the CBD. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

Students at Cairns State High School are documenting the project in a film.

Participants are responsible for their own utilities but don't pay rent and are not tied into a six month lease.

"So an owner can say, well this space has been sitting vacant for 18 months, it might not attract any tenants for 12 months – so why not turn the lights on and open it up and give people the opportunity to improve activity in the CBD?" Mr Druery said.

"Maybe by small actions, change can be made, so you start with community."





The project hopes to refill vacant shopfronts and encourage more businesses to do the same. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

The project germinated in Newcastle 20 years ago when that regional city experienced a downturn, and it is credited with transforming a city with an industrial past into a vibrant place.

Mayor Bob Manning said Renew Cairns would generate activity through occupancy and could help people trial their business, project or ideas in a commercial setting.



Cairns Chamber of Commerce vice president Matthew Tickner last year compiled photographs of vacant retail spaces in a small area of the CBD along Lake St and in the Shields St pedestrian mall. PICTURE: SUPPLIED

“By working with property owners to activate vacant or under-utilised commercial spaces, Renew Cairns can generate activity through occupancy,” Cr Manning said.

Email at renewcairns@renewaustralia.org

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Jon & Lou 7 months ago

YES! Go for it, anything like that will help, guarantee it will lead to more Permanent tenets

👍 1 ➡ Reply

Dennis 7 months ago

Plenty of parking within the city of you care to walk a couple of blocks. Trouble is most people want to park outside the restaurant they visit.. Car park in Lake Street always has vacancies. Biggest issue with a short walk in the city though is you may get mugged... More lighting, more security / police patrols more people would do a short walk.

👍 1 ➡ Reply

Brian D. 7 months ago

Sounds beaut. Our CBD is such a sad place nowadays.

Oh, how I miss the city mall we once had - packed with people, great cafes, free entertainment and just such a terrific place to be. Those huge trees were full of birds, school bands and cultural displays in the sound shell and even our mayor as Santa cooling his feet in that lovely big fountain!

All gone now.

Admittedly Shields St has been under non-stop construction for the last 20 years now, which can't have helped, but it really would be nice to see a bit of joy restored to the place.

If only for old time's sake.

👍 2 ➡ Reply

Nicholas 7 months ago

Great initiative, hopefully we'll get a few in and then the others will feed off these. Thanks for the effort being put in.

👍 1 ➡ Reply

Coathanger 7 months ago

What about more livable apartments being built in the heart of the city. Not for tourists but for downsizers. This will bring in more people to the city.

👍 7 ➡ Reply

lucifer80 7 months ago

Yep I agree that lack of car parking is a major issue so I think if that can be addressed then bring it on.

👍 4 ➡ Reply

over80 7 months ago

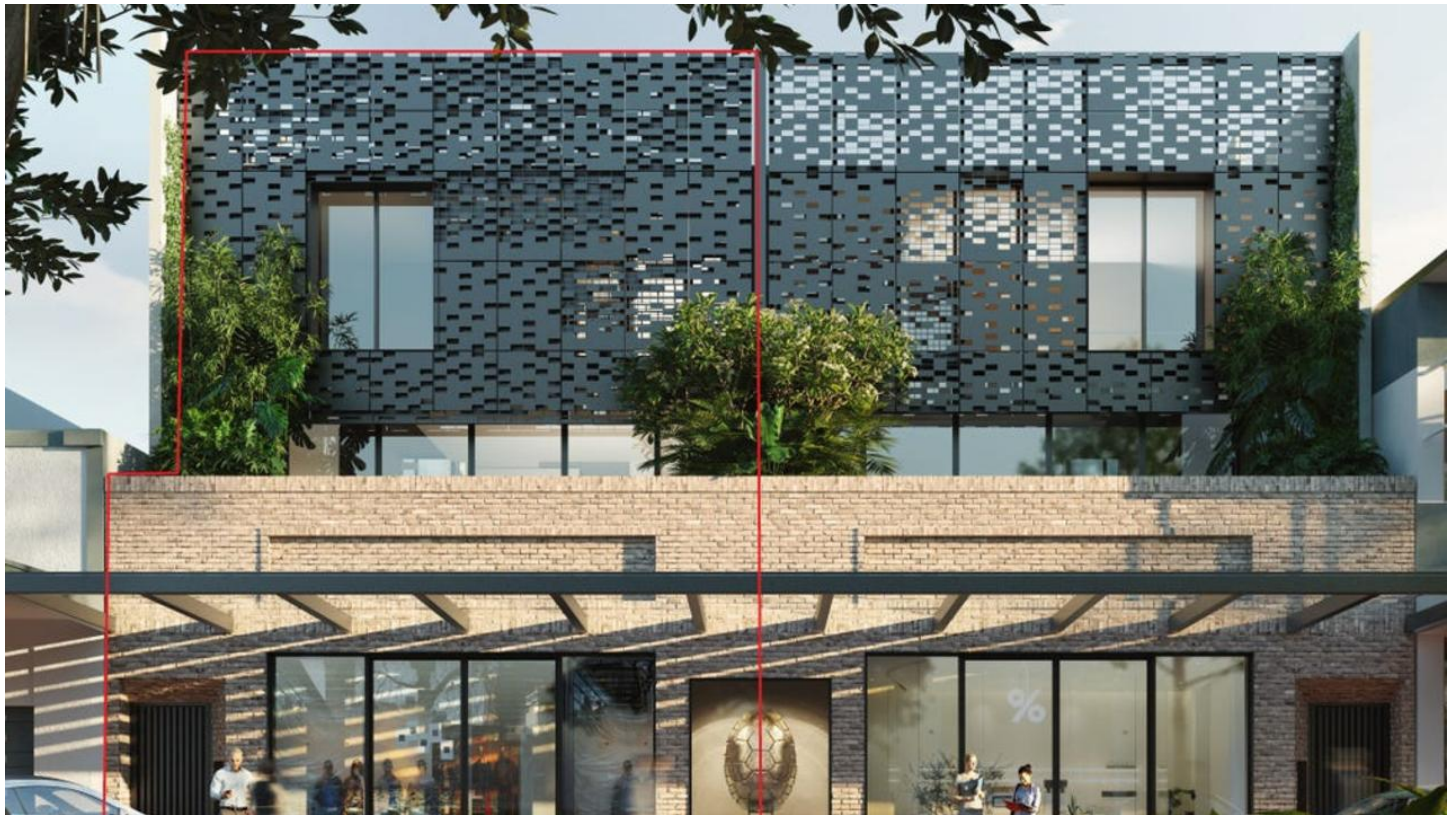
Can the council organize a survey to identify the expensive pay ticket parking bays that are hardly used and Roll back the ticket parking to free parking, that may help, other wise the Cairns Central will continue to drain the C.B.D.

👍 1 ➡ Reply

Warren 7 months ago

It's already nighmare right now trying to visit those occupied shops or eat out, try find a parking spot. So good luck to any punter taking up a lease on an empty shop or

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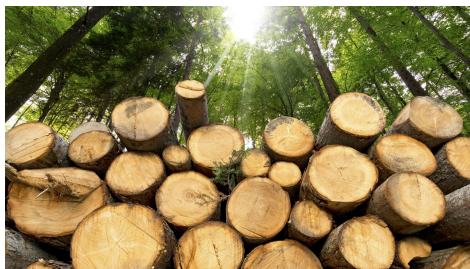


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