

**BEGA VALLEY COMMERCIAL LAND STRATEGY**

**INTERIM REPORT - FINDINGS OF STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS**

**MERIMBULA, 27 AUGUST 2019**

**1. *What are the natural advantages and strengths of the commercial centre?***

- Feelings of spaciousness, proximity to the lake with views to the lake and ocean and the unspoilt coastline which supports aquaculture
- The development of infrastructure, e.g. airport, which provides links to major cities, and the boardwalk around the lake foreshore
- The existence of interesting spaces, such as small laneways, Twyford Theatre
- The cohesive focus of the commercial community which includes young professionals who create their own work and jobs using new technology
- Connections between the boutique area of the main street and big box development of supermarkets, which are close but not too close
- Tourism visitation, with a particular focus on families

**2. What, if anything, is challenging development of the commercial centre?**

- The loss of talent, skills and energy as young people leave for work or education outside Bega Valley
- The disperses character of commercial activities which is the result of large areas of land zoned B4 Mixed Use and the increased number of home businesses
- There is a lack of identity and lack of vision for the town. The streetscape looks tired, there is a lack of lighting at night, a lack of parking, a reduction in traditional retail outlets, high rents for commercial property, many vacant premises, a lack of pride in the presentation of premises and the town centre is not pedestrian friendly. Some landowners are land banking and not carrying out any maintenance of buildings. The layout and design of the town and ageing infrastructure is limiting growth
- The composition of businesses, competition between businesses and with on-line trading, and the restricted opening hours of shops and businesses
- There are competing visions for tourism – one is focussed on adventure and nature which attracts younger people who are not using retail or entertainment facilities; the other is focussed on families. There are also changes in tourism behaviour with shorter length of stay, less camping and caravanning, and the rise of AirBnB

- A lack of identity which reflects competing visions and a lack of understanding of community needs. The centre is a mix of boutique shops catering to tourism and big box supermarkets catering to the local population
- There is a poor selection of housing for modern living, i.e. a predominance of detached houses. There is a lack of permanent residential opportunities within the centre such as shop top housing

**3. *Given the natural advantages and strengths, how could growth of the commercial centre be encouraged?***

- Council should focus on the big picture to establish a vision for the centre to drive growth. There should be collaboration between Council and business to promote the Shire to attract investment and tourism. Sources of grant funding need to be identified and made available to business owners
- Various ideas put forward for new business and catalysts to stimulate business such as:
  - educational facilities,
  - linkages to government and universities, e.g. research and development of aquaculture industry
  - professional services for the region and ACT,
  - on line collective and delivery services such as Birdsnest in Cooma,
  - a business hub and serviced/shared office space,
  - The re-use of vacant office space
  - opportunities to attract the creative community, arts and theatre
  - conference facilities as central location to Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne
  - Refocusing tourism to take advantage of the market for shorter breaks and experiences
  - develop less retail and more office space
  - activating laneway, encouraging pop-ups in vacant shops
- Create a vibrant town centre by revitalising and beautifying the centre to improve amenity and appearance by taking advantage of the estuary, lake and surrounding natural beauty, encouraging boutique tourist style development, carrying out building upgrades, improving parking and planning for traffic flows. There is the potential to create a compact commercial centre using planning laws and strategy
- Address the lack of identity through rebranding that is focussed on innovation, energy and taking risks
- Address the lack of residential space within the town centre and acknowledge the reciprocal link between residential and commercial development

**4. *What development principles or approaches are necessary to underpin growth of the commercial centre?***

- Planning needs to be collaborative with a shire-wide approach to overcome parochialism. The commercial land strategy should focus on strengths and needs to bring communities together to support each other
- Future development needs to be driven by Council and government by setting ground rules and but also by removing restrictions on development
- Council needs to understand the town and the tourism industry, e.g. 50% of tourism accommodation in Bega Valley Shire is in Merimbula. We need to cater for both residents and visitors needs
- Rebranding of the town is necessary to define identity. New buildings should be contemporary and beautification works need to be carried out to improve amenity