

# Questions for Armidale Regional Council re the Draft Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan

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1. **This plan follows the 1986 mall feasibility study, the 2003 CBD masterplan, the 2016 Towns and Villages Enhancement Plans, the 2017 Mall Vibrancy Plan, the 2018 City Activation Plan, and others — most of which did not result in significant delivery, and only served to divide the community. What is different this time?**
2. **The enormity of this plan is likely to lead to strong resistance and confusion in the community. Was any consideration given to breaking it into parts to assist in generating community support?**
3. **The 2017 proposal to introduce vehicle access to the central mall was strongly opposed by the community and did not proceed. What has changed that leads council to believe there is now community support for this proposal?**
4. **The failure of the plan to return cars to the mall in 2017 appears to be absent from the background part of this document. Was that an intentional or accidental omission?**
5. **The document says that the previous plans have been synthesised into this one - why did you not remove those elements of the multiple previous failed plans that have already been rejected on multiple occasions, such as traffic in the central mall?**
6. **The plan states that community views are "well established" through previous consultation and that "foundational questions" do not need to be re-asked. What specific processes form the basis of that claim, and where can those results be publicly viewed?**
7. **Will the question of vehicle access to the central Beardy Street mall be put directly to the community as part of this consultation, with a genuine option to reject it? (To put it another way, will people be given the opportunity to consider vehicle access in the mall separately from the rest of the CBD redesign plan in the whole?)**

8. **Was the concept of reintroducing cars to the central mall initiated by council, or did it originate with Unique Urban?**
9. **Before recommending vehicle access to the mall, did council consult any specialists in people-centred public space design or accessibility specialists to identify if that would achieve the desired outcome, and there wasn't some other structural issue discouraging foot traffic?**
10. **Many Armidale car parks are very poorly designed and inefficient, resulting in discouraging people from going to town. Is a review and redesign of all of the city carparks to be inferred from this plan, or will that be a separate project? (Or are you not planning to fix the existing carparks?)**
11. **The document refers to an Armidale Plaza Redevelopment, but there is no further information and there is no publicly announced plans for redevelopment of the Plaza. Can you clarify what this refers to please?**
12. **Has council or the consultants engaged directly with current mall retailers and businesses during the development of this plan?**
13. **Has council factored in the need for significant compensation for mall businesses and others affected by this significant change to the city?**
14. **What is proposed for the Reconciliation Fountain, and has the Anaiwan community been consulted?**
15. **What is proposed for the Bandstand in the mall? Will a new one be built elsewhere?**
16. **There are several significant trees in the mall. What is the plan for those trees?**
17. **The document refers to a "proliferation of big box retail" - Armidale notoriously does not enjoy big box retail, with both our actual big box retailers and the retail shopping centres the section then goes on to address all too small and poorly designed to be successful. Is the poor understanding of retail space indicative of the planners complete lack of skill set in retail and people-focused spaces (consistent with the plan's overall failure to design spaces suitable to how people move on foot) or a report preparation error?**
18. **Can council identify all properties it intends to acquire under this plan, name the current owners of each, and advise whether those owners were consulted during its development?**

19. Which buildings are identified for potential demolition under the "targeted demolition of detractory buildings" referenced in the plan, and have the owners of those buildings been consulted during the development of the plan?
20. A great number of buildings in Armidale, while not specifically heritage listed, have identified heritage elements such as blue brick verandahs. Have all of the building identified for demolition been reviewed for heritage features?
21. Will the Armidale City Bowling Club be compulsorily acquired?
22. Will a new bowling club be constructed somewhere?
23. What is the estimated cost of the proposed new library?
24. The current library at 182 Rusden Street has only been open since 2017, acquired during administration for \$2.4m and (from memory) a \$1.1m refit, with a number of other upgrades since. Is there a substantial problem with the existing library that would require building a new one after less than a decade?
25. What would happen to the existing library building?
26. Many Beardy Street verandahs were closed off or removed due to building code requirements and safety concerns, as well as underutilisation in the winter - not a style choice, as asserted in this document. Has council sought engineering, builder and heritage advice on the feasibility and cost of reinstatement of the verandahs?
27. Who would bear the cost of verandah reinstatement — council or private building owners?
28. Where are the car yards relocating to (noting that the old Hardman's site is being/has been sold)?
29. The plan seems to indicate that the service stations at the intersection of Marsh and Dumaresq street would be gone (one of which has only recently upgraded its underground tanks at significant cost) - is this correct?
30. Council has just imposed a substantial rates increase because it cannot afford essential maintenance of existing assets. This plan proposes approximately 16 direct council capital projects, each of which will have 7 or 8 figure price tags.
  - a. Where, other than the future fund or grants, is council intending to get the money for such a considerable redesign of the city centre?
  - b. Council has been notably unsuccessful in their grant applications - for one example, lost grant funding for the rail trail now sees ratepayers paying

**\$1.5m for preparatory works, despite the resolution that no ratepayers money should be spent on it. What is the contingency or fallback if grants or REZ contributions are less than expected?**

- c. Has council modelled the recurrent maintenance and operational costs that would fall on ratepayers, and what is that figure?**
  
- 31. Armidale has significant community facilities that are already substantially underutilised, in part because the city's educational institutions provide superior competing facilities. What analysis has council done of existing facility utilisation before proposing a major new cultural building and a new library?**
  
- 32. The Nightingale model originated as a community-driven cooperative housing movement in inner Melbourne with a specific ownership, governance and financing structure. Has council engaged with Nightingale Housing or any comparable organisation about whether that model is workable in a regional NSW context before including it in this plan?**
  
- 33. Can council detail how much time Unique Urban's designers spent in Armidale during the development of this plan, what direct community engagement they undertook, and whether they visited during peak activation periods?**
  
- 34. The plan was developed by urban designers whose professional background is in streetscapes, built form and infrastructure. Academic literature on urban design notes that this discipline tends to prioritise car access, linear movement and major capital buildings over informal, people-centred uses of space - and thus the plan, strongly reflecting that school, seems to fail the key test of getting people back to the city centre. Streetscape built form design also prioritises adult male needs and usage patterns, over female, elderly, and children's need for spaces, often reinforcing disadvantage.  
  
Did council seek input from social or retail place planners, community development specialists or others with experience designing a city with a pedestrian mall at its heart?**
  
- 35. The report makes mention of active transport, but no mention of disabled accessibility or public transport. Was this an intentional omission?**
  
- 36. What was the cost of engaging Unique Urban to prepare this plan?**
  
- 37. Was the planning put to EOI or tender? If yes, can I have a copy of the brief?**

**Additional questions asked via email 6/7/26**

How were Unique Urban retained for this work? (EOI, tender, GM delegation?)

How much were Unique Urban paid for this work?

Is this the same Unique Urban used by Mr Roncon on the Broken Hill Civic Centre?