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Parking showdown

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

Besieged business owners say their safety should come first, not the proposed reintroduction of parking meters in Lonsdale Street, Dandenong.

Greater Dandenong councillors are set to vote on 11 July on whether to end the three-year trial of free parking in the precinct between Clow and Foster streets.

Michael Hall from Hall & Partners First National real estate said parking shouldn't be charged until cars could be parked safely on the street.

As reported in the Star Journal, several businesses – including Mr Hall's – have had windows smashed and staff assaulted and harassed in the CBD streets in recent months.

Mr Hall said he was negotiating to hire spots in Dandenong RSL secure private car park due to drunken youths jumping on the bonnets of employees' cars in Lonsdale Street.

He'd also installed shutters on windows, and a security intercom system at the front door.

"We wouldn't mind paying for parking if security people were patrolling and protecting our cars,"

Doug Braithwaite, from Kiwi Steak & Cheese, said the free-parking trial should continue.

He feared paid parking would cause more customers to flee to free spaces in Dandenong Plaza.

"Everyone is moaning about every cent at the moment, I can't understand why you'd end it now."

"If you want to encourage people to the area, you clean up the area and make it accessible to everybody."

The 68-year-old Mr Braithwaite was recently followed by a hostile man "abusing the living daylight out of me" between Dandenong Plaza and Dimmey's.

"I kept walking but I wasn't sure if he was going to smack me in the back of the head."

"If that had happened to my missus, she'd

never come back to Dandenong."

Creston Real Estates Ashton Ashokkumar said businesses faced too many challenges, including safety and economic pressures.

"Everything has to come to an end but the time has to be right."

Honest Restaurant owner Mindi Patel said Lonsdale Street was showing signs of recovery with more shops opening.

The removal of free parking would make life harder though.

"The first priority should be safety, not charges," Mr Patel said.

According to a council report, free parking had "not had the expected beneficial outcomes and to the contrary now appears to be impeding retail activity in the strip."

Traders were reporting that tenants, staff and owners used the spots as "convenient free parking" and made it hard for customers to park nearby, the council stated.

"Free parking is in effect having an increasingly deleterious impact on the strip's trading rather than resolving the opposite."

The council estimated it had lost up to \$1.05 million in revenue as part of the three year trial.

A further year would cost another \$300,000 - \$450,000, which could be used to maintain and upgrade the Dandenong Activity Centre, the council report argued.

In 2019, mayor Jim Memeti had advocated strongly for the free trial to reinvigorate Lonsdale Street's trade.

But he agreed many traders were complaining that it made parking spots too hard to find.

He said the council was seeking to introduce a reduced \$1 an hour parking fee. Shopkeepers would prefer to pay the charge rather than searching for a car park, he said.

Despite the trader feedback in the council report, the trial was "absolutely" a success during the Covid years.

"It's brought confidence back to Lonsdale Street."



Picture: GARY SISSONS

Furry favourites celebrated

The aptly-named Grizzly, pictured with owner Ben, was among 150 guinea pigs on display at the Cavy Council of Victoria's 60th anniversary show in Dandenong North. Grizzly took out the 'best condition in show' award.

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