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## The ballot box can shape Perth's future

The best cities in the world find the right balance between form and function. Their streets are full of people of all ages and situations, effective public transport, parks, museums, impressive civic spaces, cafes spilling out on to footpaths and intriguing laneways full of shops, bars and boutiques.

Not so many years ago, Perth offered little of those. The CBD was a place of work that filled with people and activity during the day and emptied in the evenings. In 2000, Lonely Planet named Perth 'Dullsville'. It hurt. But it might have been the slap in the face Perth needed.

Before the 2008 election, the Liberal Party committed to revitalise Northbridge's languishing Perth Cultural Centre. From day one, the Committee for Perth was advocating for the need to take a place-based approach. We introduced place maker of international acclaim, Fred Kent from Project for Public Places, to assist in defining the place and then revamping it from concrete jungle to a destination that is vibrant and alive.

The previous Labor Government started work on Perth Arena. There was public outrage due to cost blow outs and its 'squashed beer can' design. Yet the Committee for Perth's analysis of the controversy shows it all but died down once the Arena opened and it was quickly acclaimed as one of the world's best concert venues.

At 140 William Street there are activated heritage buildings at street level with new office accommodation for government. A twenty-year hole in the ground that was a major blight to the CBD re-emerged as Brookfield Place. Their mixed use approach that combines office space with retail and hospitality venues makes both of them busy places during the day and into the evening.

Heritage was now the new black. The General Post Office was transformed into modern office accommodation. The former home to Bishop See became Lamonts.

The jewel in the crown saw the repurposing of the mothballed government buildings as COMO The Treasury - a multi award winning hotel and hospitality venue. The brains behind COMO, 2016 West Australian of the Year - Adrian Fini OAM, is now leading efforts to breathe new life into the eastern end of the city from Barrack Street to the Perth Mint.

Perth's forgotten laneways also received a much needed revamp. Many became home to small quirky venues that offered something different to the mainstream, including small bars, brought about by the modernising of liquor licensing laws.

The Perth Waterfront project announced by Labor Planning Minister, Alannah MacTiernan moved from the drawing board to reality when the Premier cut the ribbon on Elizabeth Quay last year. Despite the naysayers decrying the ripping up of the lawn, this coming of age destination brings the city to the river and will continue to grow and evolve.

Not all of Perth's transformation is the result of investment in bricks and mortar. Pop-ups, encourage the rethinking of the use of the spaces. Both Fringe World and Perth International Arts Festival have introduced us to non-traditional venues across Perth.

Looking back over this past decade, the transformation of Perth's CBD has been nothing short of remarkable. It is a credit to the current and previous government, the local council as well as the private sector and those of us who advocated for much needed change.

But there is still work to do.

One of the recommendations from the Committee for Perth's recently released Get a Move On! report was to recognise the CBD as the location for employment growth and high-density residential development and to plan for the proportion of people living and working in the CBD to increase to support productivity, vibrancy and public and active transport.

Politicians and their policies can positively or negatively impact on a city. With the state election less than two months away, the challenge for the two major parties is to commit to making sure that Perth continues to improve and is a vibrant and sustainable place to live, work and invest. While the economy may be sluggish, it will pick up and we need to be ready for that. We can't rest on our laurels because we definitely don't want to hear the D word ever again.

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