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BID FOR TOWN SQUARE



FEAR THAT BRANDING MAY NOT DELIVER 'BANG FOR OUR BUCK'

By Lisa Pahl

A plan to promote the Mt Barker district through a biannual magazine in an Adelaide newspaper will go ahead at a cost of up to \$78,000 to ratepayers.

The Mt Barker Council will spend the money on two issues of a 24-page glossy magazine in *The Advertiser* in a bid to rebrand the district as an ideal place to invest, do business and live.

It is part of a 10-step marketing exercise that was endorsed by the council at a meeting last week aimed at bringing more investment and jobs to the region.

But not all elected members were convinced that the magazine, which will also feature advertisements from housing developers, was the best use of ratepayers' money.

Cost worry

Councillor Sue Hamilton questioned whether it would deliver "bang for our buck", saying many readers did not even read supplements.

"I do worry about the cost of the Mt Barker magazine," she said.

Cr Jeff Bettcher said he wanted the council to look at other ways to promote the region for minimal cost and "not just be dragged into a marketing campaign".

Cr Carol Bailey said she had reservations about marketing the area as a liveable place with a sustainability focus when none of its new estates had truly environmental homes.

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Mt Barker and District Residents' Association chairperson Dianne Van Eck is supporting the Mt Barker Council's push to try to buy all or some of the last undeveloped block in the heart of Mt Barker.

By Lisa Pahl

A prime undeveloped block of land in Mt Barker's CBD could become a town square, with the local council in negotiations to buy all or part of the site from a retail giant.

The Mt Barker Council has confirmed it is in confidential talks with Woolworths, which owns most of the land between Druids Avenue and Morphett, Hutchinson and Stephen streets.

It follows years of community calls for something to be done with the site, which had been earmarked for a \$40m shopping centre featuring a Big W store.

The land, which could be worth up to \$10m, has remained vacant since that plan was rejected by the council in 2012.

But council chief executive Andrew Stuart told *The Courier* this week he was hopeful of securing at least some of the land for a town square.

"We have been maintaining a dialogue with Woolworths for a number of years," he said.

"Naturally we have been interested in what's happening with the site and their

COUNCIL TALKS WITH WOOLWORTHS TO BUY VACANT TOWN SITE

development plan and more recently about tidying up the site.

"We have maintained it's in the council's interest and should they sell it, council would be interested – but they had maintained that it's never been for sale.

"More recently they have said 'we will listen to your offers'.

"We have had those discussions with them in confidence but to date we haven't been able to secure a successful negotiation."

The council was interested in acquiring the land to develop as a town square, but "not at any cost", Mr Stuart said.

"It has to be within the realms of reality," he said. The council will also consider other sites in the area that may be suitable for such a development.

"Our objective is that we would secure some of that land for a town square in that vicinity," Mr Stuart said.

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