



A development application has been lodged for a major commercial and creative industries centre in Marrickville's industrial heartland. Photo: Supplied

Timber yard business proposes major creative arts hub for Marrickville

KATE BURKE | NOV 17, 2017

A bold plan hatched by the owners of a local timber yard could see a cluster of warehouses in Marrickville's industrial heartland transformed into one of Australia's largest creative arts hubs.

The industrial site on Rich Street, adjacent to the Factory Theatre, is owned by Danias Holdings and was once used to store surplus stock for their nearby timber yard. Today the partially derelict site is used by about a dozen people as a storage and work space.

But if the long-time local family business has its way, it will build a new commercial and creative industries centre that would house almost 500 artists.



More than 37 per cent of the precinct would be new open space, including a park at the centre of the site. Photo: Supplied

Three new buildings with flexible working spaces, cafes and a park would be built on the land. The purpose-built precinct would offer over 13,000 square metres of floor space for a wide range of creatives, from recording artists to videographers and painters.

A rooftop bar and exhibition space is proposed for the tallest of the three buildings, which would be five storeys high, while more than 37 per cent of the site would be new open space.

According to the development application lodged with Inner West Council this week by Danias Holdings, the project would cost almost \$50 million.



The Rich Street Precinct would have a mix of four spaces to cater to different creative industries. Photo: Supplied

"At the moment we've got about 12,500 square metres of space that about 10 or 15 people are using," said Danias Holdings general manager Angelo Angelopoulos. "Marrickville is this inner city fringe area that's sort of been forgotten about."

"This is a really exciting opportunity to bring artists together and show what they can do," he said. "Marrickville could be the Brooklyn of Sydney."

However the Rich Street Precinct relies on the approval of the larger proposed Victoria Road Precinct, with various landowners seeking to rezone 18 hectares of industrial land in Marrickville for medium- and high-density dwellings, mixed use and business development.



The site is currently home to storage spaces and work spaces for about a dozen people. Photo: Supplied

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While more than 80 per cent of the Victoria Road Precinct would be reserved for business use, it's expected that some 100 new dwellings would be built by 2036 – primarily on additional land owned by Danias Holdings, including their timber yard.

It's one of a number of developments that could drastically change the suburb – with mixed building apartments and a new library and community hub on the suburb's old derelict hospital site, and looking to rezone a large section of Carrington Road for high-rise apartment towers.

But despite concerns of overdevelopment in the area, it has the backing of many artists already working in the community – including Deb Morgan, artistic director of Marrickville's Create or Die.

Sick of seeing artists and innovators pushed out of Sydney's rapidly gentrifying suburbs, Ms Morgan has been heavily involved in community consultation for the precinct.

"The reason these areas are so attractive is that the arts make them vibrant," she said. "Artists living in affordable places make the spaces alive, cool people move in, prices go up and then the artists have to move out when they can no longer afford it."

Ms Morgan said while Danias Holdings had other commercial interests in having the land rezoned, she believed they genuinely wanted to create a thriving arts hub.

"Marrickville is going to transition; there's going to be a lot of building in the next five years," she said. "They own a lot of land and have to do residential development to make money off it. They're trying to balance it out a bit."

With their timber yard once home to record label Timberyard Records and decades spent leasing spaces to creative artists, Danias Holdings want to activate the precinct while providing some much-needed residential stock, Mr Angelopoulos said.

"We want to keep it an affordable part of the city [for artists], but give it a refresh."

The Inner West Council has yet to sight the development application for the arts hub, but a spokesperson said it was premature, given the Victoria Road Precinct proposal is still before the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE).

Council supported the proposal in June, subject to multiple amendments including limited residential rezoning. However, a report to the next council meeting, which notes the changes were never made, recommends requesting the DPE to defer finalising the changes and hold an urgent meeting with council.

"Council's position is that valuable and increasingly scarce industrial land in the inner west needs to be protected – and that includes arts and creative industries spaces," the spokesperson said.

A DPE spokesperson said the department is assessing the proposal and would consider all matters raised during community consultation including those raised by Inner West Council.

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