

Katoomba Civic Centre Upgrade FAQs



What is happening at the Katoomba Civic Centre?

Blue Mountains City Council is revitalising Katoomba Civic Centre with a \$750k grant from the Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF).

Council is matching this funding with \$750k, bringing the total funding to \$1.5m.

Why is this happening?

The Katoomba Civic Centre is an important, underused community facility at the heart of Katoomba town centre.

Originally built in the 1970s across two levels, it now provides a link between Council's Blue Mountains Cultural Centre and Library, and the Coles complex.

By reactivating this space, Council will attract more members of the community and visitors to the precinct, with the potential to enhance the visitor experience, residential amenity and stimulate the local economy.

What is the scope of the revitalisation?

The revitalisation of Katoomba Civic Centre includes:

- Installation of artworks throughout the precinct
- Fit out of the former library to accommodate a cowork space.
- Re-dressing the red canopies
- Adding greenery to the precinct
- New street furniture to the upper level
- Power source to the upper level to accommodate future outdoor activities
- Closing access between Katoomba Street and College Lane along the lower level
- Improvements to the lower level amenities for staff and customers.

When is this happening?

Planning on the project started in 2020 with Council engaging architectural services to design the amenities upgrade on the lower level and the cowork space.

In 2021, Council continued to work closely with architects to ensure the precinct improvements align with the needs of the community.

The funding was finalised in June 2021.

The new artworks were commissioned through an Expression of Interest process and installation commenced in August 2021.

An Expressions of Interest (EOI) process to select a cowork space operator began in August 2021 and, following a tender process, will be selected in January 2022. Work on the cowork space, to be located in the former library, will start around the middle of 2022.

Work on the lower level is expected to start later in 2021/early 2022.

All works are expected to conclude by early 2023.

What are the artworks?

Council selected three local artists to help us transform the Katoomba Civic Centre.

In August 2021, Dharug woman Leanne Tobin, installed the first work, entitled 'Yanema Waradah' ('Walk with Waratahs'), an arresting array of art panels that relates to First Peoples creation and cultural stories.

Another local artist Mandy Schoene-Salter painted a series of stunning murals over the five columns on the lower level. This artwork, entitled 'Luminous Presence', features colourful botanical detail to beautify this urban space.

Following this, the artwork 'Cloak of Hope' by another local artist Kevina-Jo Smith, was draped over one wall of the Civic Centre. This striking upcycled woven installation symbolises the protection of our World Heritage listed landscape.

The artworks were commissioned following feedback from the community that the space be beautified with public art.

To find out more: www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/katoomba-civic-centre-artworks

What is a cowork space?

Cowork spaces provide small businesses, independent contractors and other workers a space to do their work, network and participate in their local business community.

Creating a cowork space is an innovative way to make use of this under-used town centre space and provides connection for workers seeking opportunities to grow and collaborate with others.

Benefits of cowork spaces include:

- Cost efficiency for small operators
- Networking opportunities
- Collaboration opportunities
- Increased productivity
- Boost in creativity
- Greater flexibility
- Reduced commute time for local workers
- Retaining workers in our region to boost the local economy



Is the former Katoomba Library a suitable site for a cowork space?

Council has worked closely with architects to develop plans for the cowork space at the site of the former library.

The new cowork space will potentially include desks, partitions, lockers, heating/cooling, seminar/workshop space and digital connectivity.

A survey in August/September 2021 gathered feedback and ideas from the community on the cowork space.

What is happening at the lower level of Katoomba Civic Centre?

Part of these works will involve improvements to the existing amenities on the lower level of the Civic Centre, as well as the public connection through to College Lane adjacent to the amenities.

This includes:

- Works that will address issues related to safety, cleanliness and ongoing maintenance of this area.
- Closing to the public the thoroughfare between the lower arcade level and College Lane, while allowing tenants keyed access.
- Refurbishing toilet for the use of tenants and customers only, with modifications to improve the look and feel of the area, increase circulation spaces and providing hand basins outside the cubicles.
- The improvements will include perforated, decorative metal screens where possible, to improve air circulation and passive surveillance.

Has Council consulted with the community on this project?

There has been extensive community consultation to explore public sentiment on the future direction of the Civic Centre.

This included an online survey in April 2020 to understand the community's opinions on possible uses of the Civic Centre.

Following this, Council ran a community and business workshop in August 2020, both face-to-face and online to further explore community sentiments and ideas. (Participants were selected via an Expression of Interest process)

What were the findings of the consultation?

Most respondents outlined a strong need for coworking space or similar including: a creative space, innovation hub and collaborative/educational space, as well as improved overall identity and improved greening.

The place audit recognised the potential within the precinct to further activate outdoor spaces and public furniture, improve under-used existing infrastructure and better maintain the building.



Individuals also highlighted the strong need for public art within the precinct to improve the vibrancy and to encourage people to occupy and linger in the space.

Many expressed the opinion that the current identity of the Civic Centre does not reflect the Blue Mountains environment, many supporting a 'rebrand' to enhance the visual identity of the precinct.

What about existing users of the former library space?

Existing users have been trialling other venues while the Electoral Commission has been using the main hall (former library space). Most users have been accommodated in other parts of the building, namely the dining room and seniors' space.

While COVID has disrupted community activities recently, the limited space available for hire in Katoomba means that these spaces will see an increase in demand when activities resume. In this context the Katoomba Guide Hall is also being considered for smaller gatherings.

Is the Katoomba Civic Centre being renamed?

The naming of the complex has evolved over the last four decades. The lower level is formally known as the Town Centre Arcade, and the upper level is known as the Katoomba Civic Centre. The Katoomba Town Centre Arcade and Katoomba Civic Centre continue to be an important place for the local residents and business community. There is no proposal to rename the complex.

However, following consultation with the community, Council has named the former library space, within the complex, *Tibbi Whalan Hall*, after the Katoomba identity Muriel 'Tibbi' Whalan. As the space will be changing from a community hall to a co-work space, the naming of this space will be reported to Council for its consideration.

For further information please email: placemanagement@bmcc.nsw.gov.au

