

ROBBIE KATTER

Member for Traeger



MEDIA RELEASE

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EMPTY NQ HOSTEL COULD HELP UNLOCK HOUSING CRISIS

The key is finally starting to turn on repurposing more than 100 abandoned hostel units in a Charters Towers aged care facility as accommodation to help alleviate the state-wide housing shortage.

Townsville Hospital and Health Service (THHS) recently confirmed with Member for Traeger and Katter's Australian Party Leader Robbie Katter that there was potential in the units for housing purposes, following a site assessment by the Department of Communities and Housing (DCH).

It came after Mr Katter sponsored a petition calling for the units to be repurposed into housing for elderly low-income earners to help offset the "pandemic-induced phenomenon" that had driven down regional rental vacancy rates to unprecedented lows.

"There are still many questions to answer and details to release, but this is a very promising move towards relieving the unbearable pressure on the property market, where local real estate agents are reporting there are more people waiting for housing than there is housing available," he said.

THHS confirmed it was approached by property investment firm Sentinel to develop the vacant units, which had been out of use since 2018, and that it was preparing a proposal for the relevant minister offering a ten-year lease.

The proposal and lease would be only short-term as the site was pegged for long-term development including expanding the hospital and aged care facilities.

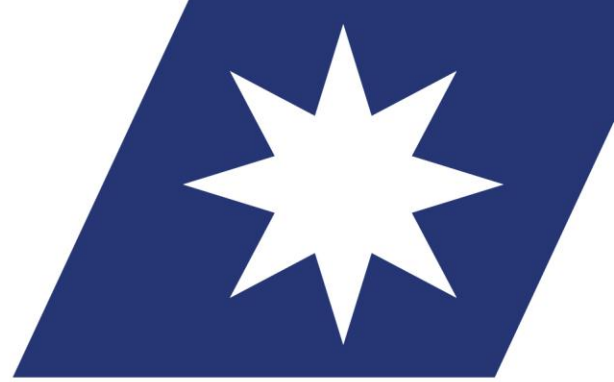
Mr Katter, who sponsored and tabled the e-petition last year, said DCH's promising assessment and Sentinel's interest despite the Queensland Health Minister's earlier dismissal of the proposal highlighted the intensifying demand to ease the housing shortage.

In her initial response to the petition, Health Minister Yvette D'Ath said that the hostel buildings were more than 40 years old and failed to meet accommodation standards, and that zoning classification would need to be changed and refurbishment costs would be significant.

The petition, which attracted close to 600 signatures, called to engage the relevant authorities to reopen the units, comprised of 13 clusters of at least eight single rooms with shared bathroom facilities and communal kitchen, dining and lounge areas.

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“There is an increasing lack of suitable rental properties for singles or couples over the age of 65 on low income, which affects residents not only in Charters Towers but the nearby rural towns of Ravenswood, Pentland and Greenvale who travel to Charters Towers for medical attention or for long periods of time,” the petition read.

“Eventide’s hostel accommodation area has been out of use since 2018 and would provide a cost-effective and readily available solution to filling the accommodation gap.”

However, Mr Katter echoed concerns from local real estate agents and community service representatives that much more detail was needed to ensure THHS’s plans would best meet the needs of the community.

“It is absolutely vital we get this right to meet the acute housing needs and living requirements of some of the most vulnerable members of our town,” Mr Katter said.

In further efforts to address the housing crisis, the KAP had renewed calls for the “regionalisation” of the state’s First Home Owners’ Grant by extending it to existing homes in smaller regional centres, and increasing it from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

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