

Legislative Council Inquiry into Museums and Galleries: information re Parramatta land acquisition for Powerhouse Museum Site

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Introduction

These pages present clear evidence that a misleading impression may have inadvertently been given by some participants in the 29 August sitting of the Legislative Council Inquiry into museums and galleries. It was implied that the decisions made regarding the purchase of the proposed museum site at Parramatta were supported by resolutions of the previous elected council. This is not the case.

Supporting material for this assertion is in two sections:

1. Extracts from the transcript of evidence of 29 August indicating that the decisions were justified on the basis that they were already approved by the previously elected council
2. Evidence from the minutes of the elected council that this is not the case. The council was, in fact, clearly opposed to the use of the site chosen by the government.

Section 1. Extracts from the transcript of evidence of 29 August 2017

This session examined the recent decision, announced on 31 July 2017, that the government had acquired the riverside land which is the government's preferred site for a relocated Powerhouse Museum. The agreement was made with the unelected Council Administrator. During the hearing, the argument was often advanced that the previous (elected) Parramatta Council had already approved the actions taken.

For example, Ms Chadwick, Parramatta Administrator (transcript page 7): ... *in this matter the views and the resolutions (my underlining) of the former Parramatta City Council are the most important. The previous Parramatta council had in December 2014 endorsed the redevelopment of the Riverside Theatre ... I see that this agreement delivers that upgrade together with the cultural precinct that was anticipated there.*

The Hon Shane Mallard supported the witnesses by such comments as (page 8) *the previous council already endorsed that position and was already a decision the council had made prior.*

The Hon. Don Harwin said (page 21) *We have now got extensive material back to us on exactly what sort of museum presence the people of Western Sydney want. I am confident that we will be able to deliver on that response.*

The Hon. Scott Farlow said (page 21) *The council has been telling us that since 2014 (ie, stating that the previous council had supported the 'move').*

Section 2: Material from the minutes of the elected council

The material in this section comes from the minutes of the elected council during 2015 and 2016, accessed from <https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/businesspapers> over the period 31 August to 10 September 2017.

The fact that the council was opposed to the use of the presently 'acquired' site for the relocated museum can be seen in **Resolution 16353, 14 January 2016, Resolution 16308, 14 December 2015** and **Resolution 16646, 9 May 2016**.

The fact that the May 2016 meeting was the last meeting of the elected council gives clear indication of the importance placed by the elected council on the views expressed.

Resolution 16353 (14 January 2016) included the following recommendations re the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum – the underlining is mine:

- a. **That** the Lord Mayor write to the relevant Ministers expressing our community's concern about the possible relocation of Powerhouse Museum.*
- b. **That** Parramatta City Council, through the Lord Mayor, commence a campaign supporting the possible relocation of the Powerhouse Museum to be at Parramatta Golf Course located near Parramatta High School or at Old King school or the Parramatta Jail site and the reasons therefore.*
- c. **That** the campaign consist of a meeting to be arranged via the state members between the Lord Mayor and the Minister, appropriate correspondence to the relevant local Members of Parliament and an appropriate media campaign.*
- d. **That** the community be made aware of the state government agenda on the Powerhouse Museum.*
- e. **That** it be noted it is imperative that the state government understand that Parramatta City Council has policy and budget approved for the part of River.*
- f. **That** Parramatta City Council outline the money invested through purchase of properties for Parramatta City Council to achieve our vision for our River foreshore.*
- g. **That** it be noted if the government insists or force the location of the Powerhouse Museum on our River foreshore, it will result in a negative impact on Parramatta City Council and its vision as a River City and this is the only parcel of land that our Council can develop and invest in a public domain that will be beneficial to our local residents and business.*
- h. **Further, that** the option of Powerhouse Museum being located on the Riverbank Foreshore will lead to a financial implication for Parramatta City Council and the City.*

Extract from **Resolution 16308, 14 December 2015**: ... *Council wishes to disagree with comments in the Minutes under Item 3, Parramatta Culture Arts and Entertainment Plan as it is not necessarily the view of Council that the Riverbank Site would be supported as the preferred site for the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum in Parramatta.*

At the very last meeting of the elected council (**9 May 2016**) **Resolution 16646** required

(a) That Council write to the relevant Minister referencing the agreement, in principle, that the State Government would design the new Powerhouse Museum within the appropriate Council footprint to ensure that the Museum does not disadvantage Council in achieving its vision for the river and not disadvantage Council's strategic asset on the site.

(b) Further, that a report be prepared outlining the discussions that have taken place to date.

(There is no evidence that any such report has ever been made as part of the assessment process. We have been seeking the details of all such discussions for over two years, but cannot obtain them).

Resolution 16571 of 11 April 2016 is of similar content. There is no other discussion of the project in the minutes of the elected council.

Thank you for reading this material and therefore giving us the opportunity to correct any misunderstandings that may have occurred as a result of the testimony given on 29 August.

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