

**Submission  
No 70**

**INQUIRY INTO GOVERNMENT'S MANAGEMENT OF THE  
POWERHOUSE MUSEUM AND OTHER MUSEUMS AND  
CULTURAL PROJECTS IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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## **Inquiry into the Government's management of the Powerhouse Museum and other museums and cultural projects in New South Wales**

Submitted by: - **Councillor Donna Davis, City of Parramatta Council**

Willow Grove is beautiful. An aura of majesty surrounds it. It has its own natural setting which is extremely rare in a cityscape and this adds to its attraction. Set back from the hustle and bustle of Phillip Street it oozes a certain mystique that is accentuated by the hedge of white roses that run parallel to its bracing fence and gate posts. Passers by turn their heads in admiration, not just of the building, because Willow Grove is so much more than this. They turn their heads to soak in this place that draws them into the past if just for a few seconds. This is the value Willow Grove brings to our city.

One of the most popular events on the city's calendar is Parramatta Lanes that was developed by the Council to activate the city at night. For 4 nights each October the laneways and open spaces throughout the CBD are filled with music, art, dancing and food, food, food. Willow Grove shines as the trees play host to fairy lights and lanterns, musicians serenade as children play in the gardens while parents queue for special treats of sticky desserts and sweet drinks. The setting is simply perfect and shows Willow Grove off for what it is – a special place.

### **Parramatta – a destination**

Parramatta is the traditional home of the Burramatta people of the Darug Nation and as such has been the meeting place for the fresh water and saltwater Eora peoples. Parramatta has been a destination for thousands of years.<sup>1</sup>

Governor Arthur Phillip's expedition up the Parramatta River in 1788, heralded a new era with Parramatta selected as the site for the first inland colonial settlement that included

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<sup>1</sup> 'Where Eels Lie Down': Parramatta's History and Heritage, Newling J, Symposium of Australian Gastronomy, 2020, website.

Government House, Elizabeth Farm, Experiment Farm, the Female Orphan School and Female Factory. We are incredibly fortunate that some of the buildings from this time remain. They are pointers to where our colonial city started, the relationships that were formed and how these have shaped the city we live in today.

Parramatta's draw as a destination has continued for 200 years. Its geographical location at the centre of a growing Sydney has made Parramatta a hub for education, business, retail, health services, medical research, entertainment & tourism. During this time, the city has been pushed and pulled in various directions not really knowing what it wants to be. Right now, the future positioning and planning of Parramatta is at a critical stage and "the competing demands of development to serve a burgeoning city versus a desire to keep the city human scaled and liveable is not a new phenomenon."<sup>2</sup> How we manage this is what really matters.

The elements that make a good city meet the needs of those who live, work and visit is quite subjective, but Parramatta is in a good position to learn from cities around the globe. By doing this one thing we glean is "*...that the loss of historic places and character threatens a locality's appeal. As Jane Jacobs argues in her often-cited book, **The Death and Life of Great American Cities**, old buildings are crucial to a thriving city. We need diversity not only of people and of businesses, but of our buildings. Often maintaining, adapting and re-using existing building stock leads to fresh thinking and creativity.*"<sup>3</sup>

Willow Grove and St Georges' Terrace are both places we cannot afford to lose. They enhance Parramatta as a destination acting as pointers to a place in time and are of high social significance. They must remain central to any reimagining of our city to ensure we incorporate the past in the present to create special places. "Great public spaces tend to

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<sup>2</sup> Design and heritage in today's cities, Veale S, GML Heritage, 2020, website.

<sup>3</sup> Design and heritage in today's cities, Veale S, GML Heritage, 2020, website.

offer positive aesthetic and sensory experiences, take advantage of local climate, and provide human-scale elements so visitors don't feel lost in their surroundings."<sup>4</sup>

### **Acknowledgement of Place**

Willow Grove was built c.1870 and has served our community as a place of residence, private hospital and business premises. The City of Parramatta Council's close relationship with the property dates to 1952 when it was subdivided with a portion sold to Council to be redeveloped into the David Frater car park. In 2014-15 the Council acquired four sites along Phillip Street that included Willow Grove and St George's Terrace that were considered key to its River Strategy program.

The River Strategy envisioned a makeover of the foreshore delivering more passive and active recreational space as well as a location to host outdoor events. The goal was to improve connectivity between the CBD and the Parramatta River. Lord Mayor of the day, Cr Paul Garrard said *"These purchases will allow Council to provide a critical civic link within the City from Parramatta Square through to Riverbank and the foreshore. It allows Council to be more flexible in its activation and rejuvenation of a core precinct in our CBD. Historic Willow Grove will be included in our plans to activate the Riverbank precinct which is a crucial part of Council's River Strategy adopted earlier this year."*<sup>5</sup>

When the NSW Government announced the proposal to relocate the Powerhouse Museum to the riverbank site, Parramatta Council called a Special Meeting and resolved:<sup>6</sup>

1. ***That the Lord Mayor write to the relevant Ministers expressing our community's concern about the possible relocation of Powerhouse Museum.***

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<sup>4</sup> Gehl, *Twelve Quality Criteria*, <https://gehlpeople.com/tools/twelve-quality-criteria/>, 2020, website.

<sup>5</sup> Parramatta Council buys 4 properties for its River Strategy plan, *Property Observer*, 25 February 2016, website.

<sup>6</sup> Resolution 16353, *Minutes of the Special Meeting of Parramatta City Council*, 14 January 2016.

2. **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.
3. **That** the campaign consists 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.
4. **That** the community be made aware of the state government agenda on the Powerhouse Museum.
5. **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.
6. **That** Parramatta City Council outline the money invested through purchase of properties for Parramatta City Council to achieve our vision for our River foreshore.
7. **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.
8. Further, that the option of Powerhouse Museum being located

At the last meeting of the elected council on 9 May 2016 it was resolved;<sup>7</sup>

- (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.

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution 16646, Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Parramatta City Council, 9 May 2016.

Within the week the Council was sacked, and an Administrator installed at Parramatta City Council. The NSW Government proceeded with their proposal to relocate the Powerhouse and with a handpicked administrator at the helm there was no elected body to voice opposition.

This course of action speaks to an attitude that has been ever present over decades of Parramatta's history. An attitude that has seen successive NSW Governments make decisions that have had a detrimental impact on our heritage and open space. There are countless examples over the years that have included (but are not limited to) giving off Parramatta Park to construct clubs and a stadium, the *Parramatta Park Trust Amendment (Western Sydney Stadium) Bill 2017* that has seen 20 hectares carved off the Parramatta Parklands, failure to support World Heritage listing of the Parramatta Female Factory, the countless proposals for the Cumberland Heritage Estate including the Parramatta Female Factory, demolition of the Parramatta War Memorial Pool and Royal Oak Hotel.

For far too long decisions about our city have been shaped by those on the outside looking in or by a few without the best interests of our entire city – local businesses and residents - at the core. The decision about the future of Willow Grove was fairly and squarely taken out of the hands of the people of Parramatta and their elected representatives on Council.

With the return of an elected Councillor body, acknowledgement of the significance of Willow Grove and concern for its future was clear. The City of Parramatta Councillors unanimously supported the incorporation of Willow Grove and St George's Terrace in any future proposal for the development of the Museum of Applied Arts and Science (MAAS). Council also sought assurances that the Council endorsed policies and strategies including the CBD Planning Strategy, River Strategy and Civic Link Plan be addressed within the design of the MAAS, *"to ensure that the MAAS development respects the site and its orientation to both the City and River... and that a strategic approach for the site and alternatives for the*

*site that are more consistent with the City's plans and vision for this site*"<sup>8</sup> be conveyed to the Minister for the Arts and Minister for Planning.

Alas, all of this has fallen on deaf ears.

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Everyone has the right to live in a great place. More importantly, everyone has the right to contribute to making the place where they already live great.<sup>9</sup> This is no more pertinent now in Parramatta than anywhere else in New South Wales.

Parramatta has undergone incredible change and will continue to do so. Positive change requires involvement from all levels of government, public and private sector investment, local businesses, and residents. A lot will need to change for Parramatta to accommodate the rapid growth that has already started and will continue over the next decades. At all times we must hold on to what is important to us as a place. What sets us apart.

Parramatta has a past that needs to travel forward with us into the future. If we do not take steps now to hold onto the places in our city that tell us about the past then can we truly call ourselves a good city, let alone a great one?

*"'Willow Grove' is the only Victorian Italianate residence situated in the "core" of the Parramatta CBD. It is considered that "Willow Grove and Potential Archaeological Site" is of exceptional cultural significance to Parramatta because of its historical, aesthetic, research (especially archaeological – Aboriginal and Historic) and rare/representative values."*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution 1395, *Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of City of Parramatta Council*, 25 June 2018.

<sup>9</sup> PlacemakingX, Kent F, 2020, website.

<sup>10</sup> New Museum for MAAS at Parramatta Final Business Case Heritage Report, Jones C & Power R, *Advisian*, 25 November 2016.