**Ultimo Village Voice**

24 July, 2022

Director, Key Sites Assessments

NSW Planning

Department of Planning & Environment

Locked Bag 5022

Parramatta NSW 2124

Kris Leveson and Karen Henoch-Ryugo for Ultimo Village Voice

c/o 258 Bulwara Road, Ultimo 2007

Ultimo Village Voice Does Not Support This Application

Ultimo Village Voice Does Not Make Political Donations

**Powerhouse Ultimo Renewal – SSD 32927319**

Ultimo Village Voice (UVV) is a community group that for almost 20 years has supported local residents, providing an avenue to address important issues that impact the local area. UVV seeks to work constructively with others to drive positive community and local business outcomes.

UVV has made numerous submissions in the fight for the survival and integrity of the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo as have other local groups (Pyrmont Action, The Powerhouse Museum Alliance and Save the Powerhouse) . Since 1988 this has been a story of government promises made but not kept starting with the gifting of the forecourt to the people of Ultimo, in 2015 the announcement that the Museum would be relocated to Parramatta despite overwhelming community objections to the move, objections of the National Trust (NSW) and other bodies, and a short-lived reprieve given to the Museum in July, 2020 whereby then Premier Gladys Berejiklian with then Treasurer Dominic Perrottet made a commitment to keep the Powerhouse Museum Ultimo open, but the question of the form that would take left unanswered.

The above signified application now answers that question to a greater or lesser extent: the Ultimo Powerhouse Museum, previously described as **a world-class museum** of applied arts and sciences with a “focus on interactivity and creative connections between science, technology, history and the decorative arts (Annual Report, 2014-2015) is to be reduced to a **facility** with a narrow focus on design and fashion, though what “design” entails is in this context unfortunately left to the imagination. This can only be described as “death by a thousand cuts.” Why is this framed as an either-or situation – either a full-fledged Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo ***or*** in Parramatta? The Pyrmont/Ultimo to Central Station Innovation/Tech Central Precinct with UTS and University of Sydney, all within walking distance of the Powerhouse Ultimo Museum, and the ever increasing demand now and in the future for highly-skilled jobs here (all noted in the scoping document), how can the comingling of all of these factors not be seen as **opportunities not to missed** to stimulate interest in STEM (and other meaningful pursuits) among school-age children in this densely populated area and beyond through collaborative efforts across the precinct? And why not cross-pollinate and coordinate efforts **with** Parramatta?

We note that Pyrmont Action, The Powerhouse Museum Alliance and Save the Powerhouse have already lodged forceful, cogent objections to the proposal. We support these submissions. Rather than return to ground already effectively plowed, we will focus on two areas we find particularly egregious.

1. The renewal proposal omits any mention of the Harwood Building and is vague at best as to what is to be done with the Wran Building. In the absence of any detail with regard to these buildings it would be irresponsible of UVV to to do anything but object to this application.
	* Why not be more forthcoming about plans for the two buildings? Under the circumstance, it is not out of the question to wonder what such a decoupling of the buildings from the rest of the site portends.
	* The proposal includes reference to accommodation for visitors and office space – to be located where exactly? Accommodation for visitors – is this or is this not a hotel?
	* Notwithstanding the parade of Powerhouse Museum (MAAS) Annual Reports touting increased attendance, and successful world-class exhibitions,(eg, 2012-13 Annual Report: the “Museum was the recipient of more national and international awards during 2012-13 than for any other year in its recent history” and remarked on the “breadth of this recognition, spanning exhibition design and delivery, multimedia, publications and community building,” the intentional gradual erosion of purpose and place has occurred with:
		+ Significant reduction in staffing
		+ Late changes to plans/exhibitions
		+ A decision in 2015 to close The Powerhouse Ultimo Museum,
		+ A systematic shift in the composition of the Board of Trustees away from science/technology and education in favour of business, finance, and development raising concerns that this is part of a poorly veiled strategy to diminish the integrity and value of the museum to the point it becomes vulnerable to vested interests.
			- What do developers bring to the Powerhouse Board of Trustees that outweighs at least the appearance of a clear conflict of interest?
				* One such board member completed only 7 months of a 2 year term in 2019, having to recuse himself but only after he was privy to a full briefing of the masterplan and market sounding.
				* Another developer has since come on the board for a 3 year term whose company has considerable interests in Western Sydney. We make no claims of any impropriety, but the appearance alone raises serious concerns of conflict of interest.
		+ A timeline of government announcements and actions that shows a determination to proceed despite negative research and objections from community and agencies.
		+ The cost of the project is estimated to be between $500 million and $600 million. The Harwood Building, seemingly no longer needed for storage and preparation, then becomes a valuable redeemable asset.
2. The renewal plan proposes a complete reorientation of the Powerhouse – the front with primary entry to open out upon Darling Harbour, the Goodsline and the CBD. The rather featureless back of the building would face Harris Street, with a proposed 6 story building usurping the forecourt, reneging on the gifting of the forecourt to the people of Ultimo. Where the City of Parramatta Lord Mayor pleaded with the State Government in 2020 not to “turn your back on us,” this proposed design quite literally does that to the people of Ultimo and the inner-west.
* The scoping document is a jumble of contradictions. It speaks to how “the renewal plan will support the vision and key planning priorities…contributing to a well-connected city with a facility that supports the desired future character of the **Pyrmont/Ultimo village** as a highly-walkable place, but it’s pie in the sky.
	+ Not only has this Museum of some standing been reduced to a facility in this application, the most densely populated sector of NSW if not Australia is now framed as a village, one that is worthy only of the back-end of a building. This tale of disconnection from the city to the east adding insult to injury is not lost on the community.
	+ The scoping report affirms the LSPS view that the Harris Street Corridor will make the largest contribution to employment growth outside of the CBD and specifically identifies knowledge intensive jobs vital to Sydney’s ongoing economic success and global competitiveness. What possibilities this might have generated for young and old engaging with this skilled work-force and in this precinct were a fully operating, innovative Museum of science, technology, history and the decorative arts still functioning but **will be lost** if this strategy is adopted
* Further, the apparent loss of the forecourt and the reorienting of the entry shows either an alarming lack of understanding of the language of design or a willful disregard for its expression, rather ironic for a facility intended to highlight design. Why is this an either-or situation? A truly creative design in keeping with the forecourt construct and entry through the award-winning, eloquent Wran Building could have acted as a bridge across communities, expanding possibilities for interaction, reinforcing the concept of open, inclusive, inviting public space along the Harris Street Corridor connecting Darling Harbour and beyond. Instead, it has chosen to be reductive, almost medieval in its approach.
* The pandemic has shown us all the need for more open public space, reinforced by the much ballyhooed vision of “Liveable Cities” and elements of the Pyrmont Peninsula Place Strategy.

This museum could be “a breath of fresh air both literally and figuratively.

In closing, Ultimo Village Voice strongly opposes this proposal. The extent to which this application represents such colossal short-sightedness, disappointing design, lost opportunities and wasted money is breathtaking, and one has to wonder if this is the intent in the first place.

Sincerely,

Kris Leveson and Karen Henoch-Ryugo for Ultimo Village Voice