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SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

STATEMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED ESCALATORS BETWEEN BOX OFFICE & SOUTHERN FOYERS

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prepared for the Sydney Opera House Trust
by
Design 5 – Architects Pty Ltd

BACKGROUND

As part of a major revision of the Western Foyer, a new lift is to be installed providing public access from the Lower Concourse level for the Box Office Foyer level. While this lift will provide disabled access for the public to the Box Office level, there is presently only limited access to the existing lifts to the Southern Foyer levels. The escalators between the Box Office and the Southern Foyers in this present proposal were not originally part of this Western Foyers project but have been added due to concern over the needs of the increasingly elderly demographic of Sydney Opera House patrons, and those who have some degree of ambulant disability. They will provide assistance for those with ambulant disability but not wheelchairs.

As the proposed escalators will reduce the aggregate width of the required egress from both of the Southern Foyers, additional egress width is to be achieved by modifying the existing egress doors to the Podium level.

Funding for these works have been staged with the external works for the Western Foyer and Loggia completed and the internal works now under construction. Funds have been secured for the escalators and construction is planned for 2008/09. Design resolution for the escalators is now well advanced and an initial Heritage Impact Statement was prepared to assess the proposal in November 2007. This revised statement includes additional information resulting from revised requirements for submissions requested by the Dept of Planning.

The whole of the design process to date, as well as the proposal, adheres to the principles and processes set out in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter 1999.

BASIS OF STATEMENT

This Heritage Impact Statement is based on information provided at briefing meetings and documents supplied by Utzon Architects + Johnson Pilton Walker – architects in collaboration, as follows:

Sydney Opera House Accessibilities & Western Foyer Upgrade
Proposed Escalators between Box Office Foyer & Southern Foyer
Architects' Statement September 2007 Issue 000 DA Submission

This document includes the following drawings:

Sydney Opera House Accessibilities & Western Foyer Upgrade
Escalators Level 12' & 21' Location Plan DA-001 REV 000
Escalators Level 30' & 42' Location Plan DA-002 REV 000
Escalator to Opera Theatre Southern Foyer DA-003 REV 000
Escalator to Concert Hall Southern Foyer DA-004 REV 000

In addition to these documents, the following documents were consulted:

Kerr, James Semple, *Sydney Opera House, A Revised Plan for the Conservation of the Sydney Opera House and its Site*. Third Edition, SOHT, 2003

Sydney Opera House, Utzon Design Principles, SOHT May 2002

Unesco World Heritage Centre website – inscription for Sydney Opera House on World Heritage List, including the ICOMOS Evaluation Report

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/166>

Australian Government - Dept of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website listing for Sydney Opera House on the National Heritage List, including relevant extracts from the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, No S132, 12 July 2005

<http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/national/sites/opera.html>

NSW Heritage Office website – State Heritage Register listing for Sydney Opera House

http://www.heritage.nsw.gov.au/07_subnav_01_2.cfm?itemid=5054880

At the suggestion of the Heritage Council, it was decided to mock up a full size model of the wall on site to test out the proposal. This mock-up and associated inspection took place on 5th October 2005. The author of this report was present and the findings have been included in this report.

STATUTORY LISTINGS

The Sydney Opera House is listed on, or affected by the following statutory registers and planning instruments:

Local

- City of Sydney - Local Environment Plan 2005 (LEP 2005)
Heritage Item No 62 /Inventory No 1064 on Schedule 8, gazetted 7 April 2000

State

- State Heritage Register (SHR)
Listing No 01685, gazetted 3 December 2003
- State Environmental Planning Policy (Major Projects) 2005
Specific provisions in Schedule 3, Part 1

National

- National Heritage List
Listing No 105738, gazetted 12 July 2005
- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)

International

- World Heritage List
Date of inscription 28 June 2007

The proposed works do not fall within the definitions given for exemptions in these planning instruments, and are thus subject to development approval.

RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL

The escalators are part of a broad strategy to upgrade accessibility throughout the SOH which has come out of the Strategic Building Plan (2001). The context and rationale for the escalator component is clearly set out in the Architects Statement and will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that the rationale is a sound one, and the escalators and modified egress doors clearly play an important role in the strategy.

The brief to the architects for the proposed escalators arises from the SOH Venue Improvement Program – Box Office Foyer Facility Brief (Issue 2.1 January 2005) which identified the provision of accessible escalators between the Box Office level and the Southern Foyers. This brief asked for an escalator of minimum 1000mm step width which would accommodate wheelchairs. For reasons given in the Architects' Statement, the ability to carry wheelchairs on the escalator is not achieved in the current proposal.

AREAS AFFECTED BY PROPOSAL

The proposed escalators will connect Level +30 (Box Office Foyer) with Level +42 (Southern Foyers to Concert Hall and Opera Theatre). Both of these areas have been ranked as having Exceptional Significance in the 2003 CMP.

The proposed modifications to the egress doors on Level +42 will affect both of the Southern Foyers, as well as the adjacent Podium. Both of these areas have been ranked as having Exceptional Significance in the 2003 CMP.

Other elements specifically identified in the CMP which will be affected by the proposal are:

- Original concept of sequential experiences on arrival, entry and circulation – Exceptional Significance
- Stairs from Box Office to Southern Foyers – Exceptional Significance
- Upper termination of folded beams forming canopies to stairs from Box Office to Southern Foyers – Exceptional Significance
- Glass wall system with steel mullions and bronze fittings and a non-reflecting zone (to Southern Foyers only) – Considerable Significance

All of the elements materially affected by the proposal are in good condition. It is an established practice at the site, that all removed material which is in sound condition is generally retained and stored for possible re-installation at a later date. With regard to the granite step units and bronze framed doors, these components may be used in repairs in other areas, or used in the new work.

Investigation of Alternatives

Concern was raised that the proposed escalators will not address the needs of frail or wheelchair bound patrons, and a number of alternatives were investigated. These were:

- Escalators which can also carry wheelchairs
- Alternative escalator locations
- New lifts between Box Office and Southern Foyers

Earlier investigations by the architects looked at the possibility of providing an escalator which could also act as a wheelchair platform. As noted in the Architects' Statement, such escalators are available in some other countries but the manufacturers would not agree to supply to Australia. JPW & SOH advise that this has been investigated at some considerable length, but without success. The location of the proposed escalator will allow for the fitting of a more advanced version in the same position at a later date, should one become available.

Alternative locations for the escalators were investigated, such as beside the existing stairs, but structural and space constraints made these not viable. The proposed location within the width of the existing stairs is the only one available within these areas.

Lift access between these levels is presently available via back of house lifts next to each auditorium but access to these must be pre-arranged. An alternative and more accessible lift location was investigated beside the existing stair, with the lift arriving adjacent to the southern doors from the Southern Foyer to the upper podium. This location had impacts on service areas as well as the structure and in addition to this, OH&S constraints made this location impossible.

Due to the nature and significance of the spaces, options for lift access are very limited but alternative lift locations are still under review as part of investigations into the future of the Opera Theatre and other upgrading works.

Options for replacing the lost egress widths resulting from the installation of the escalators were considered, and after examination of the existing configuration of the exit doors, it was decided that an additional door width could be accommodated within the existing framework for each set of openings, without requiring modifications to the sloped sections of the glass walls. This was considered to have the least impact.

DISCUSSION OF IMPACT OF PROPOSAL

This discussion is divided into a number of sub-headings which consider the impact of the proposal in relation to the values of the Sydney Opera House as identified or defined by the following listings and guiding policy documents:

- World Heritage Listing
- National Heritage List
- State Heritage Register listing
- Utzon Design Principles
- Conservation Plan 2003

World Heritage Values

The Sydney Opera House has been inscribed on the World Heritage List for its Outstanding Universal Value and as a Masterpiece of Human Creative Genius under criterion (i) of the Operational guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Outstanding Universal Value

The Sydney Opera House constitutes a masterpiece of 20th century architecture. Its significance is based on its unparalleled design and construction; its exceptional engineering achievements and technological innovation and its position as a world-famous icon of architecture. It is a daring and visionary experiment that has had an enduring influence on the emergent architecture of the late 20th century. Utzon's original design concept and his unique approach to building gave impetus to a collective creativity of architects, engineers and builders. Ove Arup's engineering achievements helped make Utzon's vision a reality. The design represents an extraordinary interpretation and response to the setting in Sydney Harbour. The Sydney Opera House is also of outstanding universal value for its achievements in structural engineering and building technology. The building is a great artistic monument and an icon, accessible to society at large.

Criterion (i): The Sydney Opera House is a great architectural work of the 20th century. It represents multiple strands of creativity, both in architectural form and structural design, a great urban sculpture carefully set in a remarkable waterscape and a world famous iconic building.

The areas and elements affected by the proposed escalators are a significant and integral part of the suite of components and design principles which together support the values expressed in this inscription. The proposal will have an impact on these elements and principles and this is discussed in detail under the Utzon Design Principles and Conservation Plan below.

Considering this larger picture, the impacts of the proposal are confined to the spatial and aesthetic qualities of the stairs and their interface with the Box Office Foyer and the Southern Foyers. None of the folded beams or other significant structural elements are materially affected but the escalators will have a substantial impact on the spatial experience of these elements. When these negative impacts are balanced against the potentially significant positive impact on access by the *society at large* to this iconic building, then these impacts are considered by this author to be acceptable.

National Heritage List

The National Heritage Listing, as set out in Schedule attached to the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No S132, 12 July 2005, describes the significant values of the Sydney Opera House under the various National Heritage criteria. The description of the values in this listing is extensive and repetitive, extending over six pages with no summary statement. The listing is substantially based on the Conservation Plan 2003, the Utzon Design Principles, as well as the SHR listing and other published sources.

Values which are relevant to this proposal have been extracted and quoted below followed by comments:

Criteria (e) ... The building's ability to emotionally move people and invoke a strong aesthetic response is enhanced by the experience of approaching, entering and moving around the building and surrounds. The large forecourt and sweeping podium steps prepare the visitor for the majestic quality of the soaring internal spaces including the folded concrete beams throughout the building, and the reinforced radial cranked beams in the northern foyers.

These values are largely related to the human experience of the place and specifically the arrival sequence. Both of these are discussed in detail in the sections below. While the proposal substantially impacts on the stairs and the concrete canopy above which are a significant part of this experience, the impact is considered an acceptable one.

State Heritage Register

The listing on the SHR gives a reasonably concise Statement of Significance. Selected text relevant to this proposal is quoted below, followed by comment.

The Sydney Opera House is of State significance as a twentieth century architectural masterpiece sited on a prominent peninsular in Sydney Harbour. Its public spaces and promenades have a majestic quality, endowed by powerful structural forms and enhanced by vistas to the harbour and the city. An icon of modern architecture, the Sydney Opera House uses the precise technology of the machine age to express organic form. It has scientific and technical significance for the ways in which its construction continually pushed engineering and building technologies to the limit.

The qualities and values referred to here are associated with the human experience of the place, as well as the technology and engineering. The technical values remain substantially unaffected by the proposal, however there is some impact on the arrival sequence, as part of this human experience. This is discussed in detail below under the Conservation Plan and in the Summary.

The Sydney Opera House provides an outstanding visual, cultural and tourist focal point for Sydney and Australia.

This is an important aspect of the significance of the place. It is the issue of providing more equitable access to the public spaces in order to retain this value, which is the driving force behind this proposal. At present there are serious limitations on access by visitors and patrons with impaired mobility to the public spaces. The whole access upgrade aims to address this as much as possible, but this cannot be done without impacting on some of the major elements and spaces in this arrival sequence. The proposal seeks to minimise these impacts and this is dealt with in greater detail in the discussion which follows. In conclusion on this particular value, the potential impact will be a positive one.

Utzon Design Principles

In January 1965, Utzon describing his original concept for the building, explained that disabled access to the auditoria would be by means of two lifts. (Utzon Design Principles page 69). These two lifts are still in operation, but due to the major revision of the interior arrangement following Utzon's departure, they are now within the backstage areas. This is contrary to Utzon's original intention. Since that time, public expectation as well as statutory requirements for more universal accessibility has placed improvements in these areas very firmly on the immediate agenda.

Now that Utzon is once again involved in the project, he has re-visited this issue and has put together very specific recommendations. These are not in the Utzon Design Principles document but they are set out in the Architects' Statement accompanying this application. It is important to repeat them:

Utzon has recommended that escalator access is possible between the Box Office Foyer and the Southern Foyers of the Concert Hall and Opera Theatre within the following guidelines:

- *No escalators should be placed into the external steps;*
- *New escalators between the Box Office Foyer and the Southern Foyers should be located to the East and West sides of the stairs as to not obstruct the visual experience of arrival up the stairs from the vehicular concourse through the Box Office to the Southern Foyers;*
- *The different geometry of the escalator and stairs should be separated and contained with the use of a new precast wall matching the existing side walls;*
- *The new wall should relate to the geometry of the canopy above but not touch it;*
- *The existing handrails should be retained and extended where necessary for safety requirements.*

It is clear that the current proposal fits exactly within these guidelines, and thus complies with Utzon's more recent and specific design principles.

In broader terms the proposal honours and respects the Utzon Design Principles. In particular the principles of *Orientation and Movement, Additive Architecture, Light, and Process*. These are explained in more detail in the Architects' Statement, (refer page 11 of statement).

Conservation Plan 2003

The following policies in the Conservation Plan 2003 are relevant to this issue. The relevant text is copied from the CP and shown in italics, with our comments below it.

Policy 1.1 *All work on the Sydney Opera House should be carried out within the framework of Jorn Utzon's design principles as endorsed in 2002.*

- The proposal fully complies with these Utzon principles and more detailed ones which followed.

Policy 1.4 *In any adaptation or modest functional improvement, interiors designed by Hall should retain or recover the character of his original design regimes with their co-ordinated detailing.*

- Although completed by Hall, the affected spaces are really Utzon spaces with fittings designed by Hall. Thus pursuing an Utzon designed solution for the escalators is appropriate and complies with this policy.
- The escalators could be regarded as a modest functional improvement but their impact is high on elements and spaces of Exceptional Significance.
- With the modifications to the egress doors to the podium, the glass walls and doors are Hall's work, again within a strong Utzon context. The proposed modifications to these doors, respects the design and original Hall configuration of these elements.

Policy 1.5 *Major works within the auditoria and podium are acceptable where technical advance, expert advice, design quality, adequate resources and meticulous construction can be combined to create performance and service facilities that will improve function and reinforce or enhance the significance of the Sydney Opera House, provided that:*

- *the work is planned in the context of an overall plan for the place;*
 - *the scheme is developed in accordance with Policy 56.1 on the management of change*
- Technical advance is only partially relevant as the preferred escalator design is not available in Australia – refer to Architects' Statement. The works will be such that should one of these escalators become available in the future, its installation in this position should still be possible.
 - Expert advice and design quality are both satisfied by the proposal and the design team.
 - Adequate resources and meticulous construction can only be re-emphasised here at this stage.
 - The proposed works are being done in the context of a revised access strategy.
 - In accordance with policy 56.1 – continuity of, and access to expert advice is essential.

Policy 17.1 *Both original arrival sequences with their different and changing experiences should be retained:*

- *forecourt, grand staircase, podium, box office foyer, and auditoria foyers;*
 - *vehicle concourse, stairways, box office foyers and auditoria foyers*
- In the proposal, the spaces and sequences are retained but the configuration and clarity of the stair space is altered. Palette of 'natural' materials and textures is respected but the escalator will introduce metal and glass. As long as this is carefully detailed, the impact should be minimal. The design and documentation so far suggests that this will be the case.

Policy 18.1 *Any proposal to improve access between levels should not:*

- *vitiating Utzon's concept for the sequence of public spaces (see .. policy 17.1):*
 - *interrupt or obscure any of the original structural systems (for example, folded and radial cranked beams);*
 - *result in the sub division or cramping of spaces with an assessed significance of 'considerable' (B) or 'exceptional'(A).*
- The sequence of arrival spaces is maintained and respected.
 - The proposed blade wall separating the escalator from the stair will partially obscure the lower portion of the folded and cranked beams when viewed from the Southern Foyer. This has been tested by a full size mock-up on site which confirmed that this is correct, but it was considered that the amount of obscuring was not substantial enough for it to cause concern. Alternative lower configurations were considered and discussed but it was agreed that none of these were acceptable. The alignment of the wall with the beam above as shown is crucial in this.
 - The proposal will result in a slight 'cramping' of the stair widths but as these are very generous, this is considered acceptable. Related to this is the issue of the generosity of space allowed for the escalator itself. At the site mock-up it was explained that Utzon did not want any of these spaces to be cramped and that the impression for the visitor must be one of generosity of space to enhance the experience. Thus the space allowed for each escalator will permit a much wider escalator tread width to be considered. We recommend that the width of the escalator treads be maximised to provide a generosity of space commensurate with the space allotted.

- The spaces beneath the escalators, which will be affected by the required machinery, are all service areas and are of little significance.

Kerr envisaged that escalators and wheelchair lifts would be required and discussed options (pages 62-64). In his Conservation Plan, he recommends consideration of an escalator which rises at the same rake as the stair with landings “built into its continuous traverse” as an option for access between Concourse and Box Office levels. For the stairs between Box Office and Southern Foyers, he states “Each could be fitted with a single ‘Landing’ type escalator programmed to travel up or down as required.” This ‘Landing’ type escalator which will allow carriage of wheelchairs, is the one mentioned in the Box Office Foyer Facility Brief. While such an escalator is available overseas, it is not available in Australia for the reasons given in the Architects’ Statement.

Kerr also notes that these escalators would cause least disruption to the character of the spaces. It is considered that this current proposal complies with this statement. The success is in the proportioning of the space for the escalator, the detailing of the dividing wall, and the detailing of the escalator handrail. This latter element is not yet fully resolved but the principle of the dark bronze coloured handrail on top of a glazed balustrade, fitting in as discretely as possible with the existing handrail language, must be closely adhered to.

The modifications required to the existing bronze framed glass doors to the Podium, will visually alter the rhythm of these elements, but only in a very minor way. It is our opinion that these changes will not be unduly noticed by the public. They will not cramp any of the existing spaces or egress widths, instead these areas should be freed up by the improved access. The sense of light and visual connection between inside and outside will not be affected by this proposal.

Summary

The various listings for the Sydney Opera House identify primarily the same values for the place, and the management of these values is most comprehensively and concisely addressed in the two principal documents, the Utzon Design Principles and the Conservation Plan 2003.

The major impact aesthetically will be on the stairs themselves and their surrounding surfaces, particularly the folded beam canopy at the top. This is a very significant component in the arrival sequence to both of the major auditoria and affects the visitor and patron’s experience of the place.

The present arrangement with the full width stairs has a very strong uncluttered clarity with floor (steps), walls and ceiling of the space defined precisely, each with a singular configuration and treatment. For both stairs this singular uncluttered statement for each element adds to the drama of the transition between the relatively dark, low ceiling space of the Box Office and the lofty and light, rib vaulted Southern Foyers. This is an essential component in the sequential arrival experience identified in the CMP and the Utzon Design Principles. The proposed escalators will definitely impact on these qualities and experience by adding another different element on one side. This will negatively impact on the symmetry and singularity of each stair, particularly in its relation to what will become an asymmetrically aligned concrete canopy above. It is very important that the blade wall which separates the escalator from the stair does not prevent the overall original width of the opening from reading as the dominant element. The site mock-up confirmed that this reading of the full width opening could be respected and that placement of the escalator away from the main visual axis from the Box Office level Podium entry and from the concourse stairs greatly assisted in this.

An important quality of the existing stairs is the generosity of space in their uninterrupted width which is also related to the sense of space below the canopy. With the insertion of an escalator and separating within each stair, this perception of generosity must be maintained within the stair as well as within the escalator space. This has been discussed above.

Another major impact derives from the disparity between the rake of the escalator and that of the stair, and the blade wall required to conceal this disparity. Alternative wall configurations, (lower and using a different rake), were investigated but it was found that the present proposal had the least impact. In considering this impact, the two singular elements of the stairs themselves and the folded beam canopy above must both be respected. Inevitably, each is compromised to some extent but the integrity of each is also respected. It is the relationship between them which suffers the greatest

impact – the partial masking of the folded beam canopy by the wall, and the reduced width of the stairs against the full width canopy, as discussed above.

In the sequence of approach/entry this disparity between stair and canopy widths will be less distracting than on exit, where the intrusive effect of the wall is more obvious. This is considered a justifiable and valid approach as it is the entry sequence which is considered the most important and dramatic. In this respect it will be the finish on the top of the blade wall, and the treatment of the escalator balustrade which will require very careful resolution to ensure they do not draw unnecessary attention to this intrusion and disparity.

On the basis of what was demonstrated with the mock-up, the impact is considered acceptable in the light of what is achieved in terms of accessibility for the patron and visitor.

With regard to structure, the structural engineers advise that there are major concrete beams at both the top and bottom of the stairs, however alteration of the bottom beam would have less impact than on the top beam. The overall length of the escalator unit will require that one of these beams is altered. It is therefore preferred that this be done on the bottom beam. While these beams are important structural elements, they are not part of the exceptionally significant folded beam system.

The alterations to the egress doors to accommodate an additional leaf per set is considered an acceptable if not desirable impact, as freer and more open access between the Southern Foyers and the Podium would strengthen Utzon's original vision. However, with these alterations it is essential that the existing detailing and materials (Hall's design) are copied in the new work. The Architect's Statement confirms that this will be the case. Should there be a major refurbishment on the glass walls in the future, then that may present an opportunity to re-appraise the design. This would be consistent with Kerr's Policy 8.1. Until then all work should respect Hall's design for these elements.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

It must be stated that although this proposal fully complies with the Utzon Design Principles and the policies in the CMP, it will have a substantial impact on these exceptionally significant spaces and on the arrival experience. However it is agreed that the design has now been developed to the point where the negative impacts have been addressed as much as possible and the proposal is now supported. As a counterbalance to these impacts, it must be acknowledged that the proposal will provide a considerable improvement to the availability of assisted access between the Box Office Foyer and the Southern Foyers. In this sense it will make the Southern Foyers and auditoria more easily accessed and thus will improve the human experience for many visitors and patrons. This aspect of elevating or improving the 'human experience' is a fundamental principle in Utzon's original concept as well as his more recent Design Principles.

The impacts on the World Heritage, National Heritage, and State Heritage values of the place are considered acceptable as long as the recommendations in this report are implemented.

These negative impacts will require careful management and monitoring through to the completion of the works. The colour, materials and finishes of the new elements will be crucial in the success of this proposal. It is considered that the proposal as documented should achieve the desired result but further samples should be made, tested, discussed and approved before a definitive solution is reached.

In addition to the recommendations made above, the following measures are recommended to ameliorate negative impacts:

- Finishes on dividing wall to match adjacent granite, but with careful attention to the sheen, especially on the top surface. This surface should not detract from the effect of the cumulative width of stair and escalator and should not distract from the singular drama and elegance of the folded beam canopy above.
- Width of the escalator treads to be maximised to provide a generosity of space commensurate with the space allotted.
- Resolution of the detail of the space between the escalator balustrade and the adjacent wall. This should be simple, fine, clean and easily maintained.
- All fixed handrails to match existing in all detail.
- New escalator handrail to be a dark colour – as close as possible to existing handrail colour.

- Lighting in the stair section to match the existing in the fixed handrails.
- Lighting to escalator to be just above tread level with intensity and subtlety to match fixed handrail lighting.
- Line of existing top and bottom risers to be maintained as the defining edge of the granite paving across the full width of the opening. Metal maintenance hatches are to finish at this line at top and bottom of escalator and should be coloured to recede and sit comfortably within existing granite paved finish, and not confuse the clear and continuous line of the existing stair area.
- Materials and details of alterations to the egress doors to match existing.
- All temporary hoardings and barricading are to be designed and constructed to minimise their visual and physical impact on the affected area and on visitors and occupants of the building.
- All existing elements and finishes of the building must be protected from damage during the course of the works.

With regard to lighting, the proposal describes following existing lighting principles and details and this is supported. Solutions should be refined by testing full size samples on site. The same applies to signage which is still to be resolved. Any signage should be minimal and as least distracting a possible. It must also be consistent with and respect other signage in the house and must be clear.

It is recommended that the proposal be approved and that all the issues identified above as well as the resolution of details and finishes, be reviewed and approved to the satisfaction of the SOH Conservation Council and the SOH heritage consultant.



Alan Croker
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