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'Let the people choose' Powerhouse Museum design

Joanne Vella, Parramatta Advertiser

The public has called for the government to release all architects' designs for the Powerhouse Museum following backlash over the "monstrosity on stilts" design that would signal the demolition of historic Parramatta properties.

The release of the winning Powerhouse Museum design for Parramatta has signalled the likely demolition of historic properties Willow Grove and St George's Terrace but a glimmer of hope that they could be saved remains.

The State Government's winning design was released last night and prompted opposition arts spokesman Walt Secord to label it "monstrosity on stilts".

Paris firm Moreau Kusunoki will design the museum with the support of Australian firm Genton. Parramatta councillor Donna Davis said there was some hope for saving St George's Terrace and Willow Grove, the two-storey Victorian Italianate villa that was also used as a maternity hospital. The Powerhouse Parramatta will relocate from Pymont.

"I think that the future of St George's Terrace and Willow Grove is grave but there is still a glimmer of hope while they're still standing that the building could be saved in some way," she said.

The design for Powerhouse Parramatta. The design has attracted negative comments.

Cr Davis said a relocation of Willow Grove to Parramatta's historic Fleet St heritage was a possibility.

"Yes, it's expensive but unless they do the exercises to find out that that's an option we should explore," she said.

Cr Davis said the architects should only have been given one brief — to build around the historic properties. "There are six architects that have done two separate designs each," she said.

"If they want it to be successful, let's make sure the people of Parramatta love it. Let us choose."

Ms Meade slammed the design. "It looks like we've got the matching site for the country's ugliest stadium (Bankwest) to be blunt," she said. "The response I saw online overnight from the design was a flood of disappointment and anger. This is not what Parramatta want. When will the government listen. People of Parramatta must drive this or it will fail."

Mr Secord also labelled the design as "utterly disappointing". "The whole design is completely out of step and no effort has been made to engage with Australian design principles and the culture of western Sydney," he said. "The Berejiklian Government was warned about the flood plain at Parramatta and it responded by putting together a Queensland-style flood and cyclone house deep in the heart of Parramatta. "This project has lurched from crisis to crisis and the winning design is utterly disappointing."

He also questioned the \$1.6 billion relocation cost from Pymont in tough economic times.

"Sadly, the arts community has predicted that this project will be yet another cost blowout like the light rail and it will likely surpass \$2 billion before it is eventually completed," he said.

Parramatta state Liberal MP Geoff Lee said he would support an option to relocate Willow Grove.

"My preference was to preserve Willow Grove," he said.

"Unfortunately that's not my decision."

He said designs were always controversial.

"It's a very unusual design but I think the wonderful thing it does is deliver the largest museum in NSW with no columns in the middle," he said.