

Delays hit refurbishment plans for Riverside Theatres

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Linda Morris

The Berejiklian Government has failed to meet the deadline for a \$100 million redevelopment of the Riverside Theatres in Parramatta, which underpinned a deal designed to future-proof the Powerhouse Museum.

Create NSW has not supplied Parramatta City Council a business case for redevelopment of the Riverside Theatres by the due date of November 30, the latest in three extensions granted.

[Photo: The Riverside Theatres in Parramatta.]

The missed deadline amounts to a technical breach of an agreement with council reached in July 2017, and varied in 2018, in which the NSW Government said it would fund the redeveloped theatres in return for buying the Parramatta riverfront land on which it is to build the new Powerhouse Museum.

Under that agreement, City Council received \$140 million for the Philips Street site, committing to spend \$40 million on its 20-year arts and culture plan, including construction of a new pedestrian bridge across the Parramatta River. The balance of \$100 million has been set aside for renovation of Riverside Theatres to make it a bigger drawcard for touring international and national shows. The cultural centre includes three venues, the largest of which can seat 761 people.

Create NSW foreshadowed it would seek further revisions to its agreement with Parramatta City Council. "The NSW Government continues to work collaboratively with the City of Parramatta Council and Riverside Theatres in devising a business case for an upgrade of the theatres," a Create NSW spokesperson said. "A revised Heads of Agreement has been drafted and is being finalised in order to submit the business case, with the NSW Government keen to ensure that the theatres meet the future needs of a growing Parramatta."

The delay comes amid deep misgivings within council about the possible demolition of the former maternity hospital, Willow Grove, and St George's Terrace, a row of Victorian period terraces, to make way for the new museum. Council said the revitalisation of arts and culture remained an important priority and it was working with government to explore the redevelopment of the Riverside Theatres, including finalising a business case.

If council and government can't reach an agreement on the scope of the theatres' redevelopment, council can potentially take the \$100 million, now in trust, and proceed with the renovation itself. But with total costs expected to exceed \$160 million, and given the amount of planning work done to date, there may be little appetite for council to go it alone.

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Delays hit plans for Riverside Theatres

Linda Morris

The Berejiklian Government's Create NSW has failed to meet the deadline for a \$100 million plan for a new arts and culture precinct in Parramatta, which underpinned a deal designed to future-proof the Powerhouse Museum.

Create NSW did not supply Parramatta City Council with a business case for redevelopment of the Riverside Theatres by the due date of November 30, the latest in three extensions granted.

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spend \$40 million on its 20-year arts and culture plan, including construction of a new pedestrian bridge across the Parramatta River.

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If council and government can't agree on the scope of the project, council could take the \$100 million, now in trust, and proceed by itself. But with total costs expected to exceed \$160 million, and given the amount of planning work done to date, there may be little appetite for council to go it alone.