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The Sydney Morning Herald

## **Council warns of Parramatta Powerhouse safety risk** (in print as) **Council eyes redesign due to flood risk**

By [Linda Morris](#)

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City of Parramatta Council is proposing major design changes to the new Parramatta Powerhouse, warning of a safety risk to people gathered around the museum and on the riverfront during flash floods.

Council officers also canvassed a name change for the museum, questioning its appropriateness given the institution will no longer occupy “a redundant power station in Ultimo” and is to feature the latest industrial and design innovations. “[The] council believes that a name that is more symbolic and relevant to the Parramatta setting should be considered,” they said in a draft submission in response to the Environment Impact Statement for the museum.

Last night, Parramatta Council backed construction of the new Parramatta Powerhouse in a knife-edged vote last night that divided its elected councillors.

Lord mayor Bob Dwyer used his casting vote to defeat calls for council to urgently meet with the Premier Gladys Berejiklian to convince her to save two heritage buildings slated for demolition.

Across the chamber, councillors agreed that the Italianate villa and former maternity hospital St George's Terrace deserved protection.

But a majority argued the city could ill afford to turn down the government's \$1.17 billion arts and culture investment at a time of economic decline and in the face of funding disparity in western Sydney.

Backing Cr Pierre Esber's proposal for a meeting with the Premier, Deputy Lord Mayor Clr Michelle Garrard said the Parramatta Powerhouse should not be built at the expense of one of Australia's oldest homes. “Nobody is saying we don't want investment in Parramatta and we don't want a museum in Parramatta,” she said. “I don't think it's necessary that we get the Powerhouse Museum. It's been said so many times over ‘why can't we get our own museum?’ Why can't western Sydney

get a museum? Why does a museum have to go on that site at the expense of heritage?"

But Liberal Cr Steven Issa said Parramatta had already won the political fight when the government named it the new site of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences over rival cities and councils in NSW.

[The refined design of the new Parramatta Powerhouse Museum showing the undercroft.]  
Independent Cr Andrew Wilson said he regretted the fate of Willow Grove. "I want to save it but in my opinion the decision has been made. Stop poking the bear."

Notice of a rescission motion was subsequently lodged delaying council's formal endorsement of a submission prepared in response to the Environment Impact Statement for the Parramatta Powerhouse.

The draft report raised major design concerns around flooding and canvassed a possible name change for the museum, questioning its appropriateness given the institution will no longer occupy a "redundant power station in Ultimo" and is to feature the latest industrial and design innovations.

"Council believes that a name that is more symbolic and relevant to the Parramatta setting should be considered," the draft submission said.

Museum planners were urged to reconsider a large undercroft to be built beneath the museum that would lift its floors above the one-in-100-year flood zone. While protecting the museum's patrons and its collection, it was council's view that flood storage was unnecessary and achieved very little flood mitigation "at the expense of creating severe hazards and risk for site occupants", it said.

An alarm system is proposed to warn people on the riverbank and in the undercroft of flash flooding.

The submission said public safety shouldn't be reliant on "high technology flood warning systems that in any event cannot predict flash flooding". In February the impact of flooding was underlined when the ground floor of a four-level car park and the riverfront, on which the museum is to stand, was partially submerged by floodwaters.

[Inundation of the ground level car park on the site of the new Powerhouse Museum in February.]

Council has recommended structural engineers Arup delete the undercroft as it "divides the landscape, creates dark, underground voids and lacks seamless integration with the surrounding public domain".

Closed on three sides and open to the river, the undercroft has been proposed for use as basketball courts, temporary exhibition spaces or a skate park. Council says the four-metre-high ceiling is too low for most of these options.

"Location of large, habitable spaces within a high hydraulic flood zone also presents a [significant] threat to life and is unlikely to be permitted," it noted.

The draft submission describes the museum as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to realise an "exceptional, world-class cultural and arts facility that nurtures a thriving social and cultural precinct" and says Parramatta's culturally diverse population would benefit from the investment in culture and the arts and increased job opportunities, including 3000 ongoing positions.

Transformation of the site demanded a design that was second to none and imparted an outstanding legacy to the city, the council said.

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While the design had many positive elements, the council wanted the government to collaborate with it more closely. Heritage was not a "fundamental element of the design", it said.

The EIS prepared for Infrastructure NSW has recommended the Parramatta Powerhouse proceed despite the loss of two heritage buildings, as the benefits of the culturally significant institution outweighed heritage concerns and loss of the community's sense of place.

Among other design changes, council insists the Civic Link, which funnels visitors from Phillip St and Parramatta Station, should be at least 20 metres wide.

A spokesperson for Infrastructure NSW said it would consider and respond to all submissions received during the public exhibition period.