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The Sydney Morning Herald

## Willow Grove relocation process in turmoil after National Trust pulls out



By [Linda Morris](#)

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The historic villa of Willow Grove, which was [pulled down to make way](#) for the \$915 million Parramatta Powerhouse, is lying in bits in a storage facility in south-western Sydney and seems unlikely to be reconstructed anytime soon. National Trust NSW has withdrawn from the reference group set up by the Perrottet government to find it a new site, saying that on inspection of the building's stored remains and catalogues, it had concluded that the mansion could not be "authentically reconstructed".



The Italianate villa Willow Grove before it was dismantled. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*

The surviving Victorian mansion on the Parramatta riverside was to have been photographed, catalogued, documented and surveyed in detail to enable it to be reconstructed on a new site to be decided by mid-year.

The 1891-built home came down last year after the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union [lifted a green ban](#) that had protected it from relocation. A separate heritage-listed row of terraces has been incorporated into the design of the Parramatta Powerhouse.

Slate roofing was salvaged, along with windows and doors, timber framing and stairs, the front palisade fence and 90 per cent of the original bricks.

These elements are housed in a storage facility that was clean and secure, and wrapped in thick plastic to protect from dust, the Trust's advocacy manager Jane Alexander said. Alexander declined to name the facility.

Adequacy of storage was not the issue.

"When you reconstruct something you have to take an extraordinary level of detail and we didn't think the amount of detail taken would adequately allow for a reconstruction," Alexander said.

"The Trust felt it would be more of a recreation of the building using salvaged elements from Willow Grove, especially when you take into consideration new builds have to meet building codes and new accessibility standards."

The Trust has long opposed the dismantling of Willow Grove but its withdrawal from the Willow Grove Community Reference Group is a blow to the credibility of the government relocation process. The reference group has met at least twice and includes members of the Parramatta business community, Parramatta City Council and unions. Once a new site for Willow Grove is decided, planning and design approval has still to be obtained.



Willow Grove in the process of being dismantled. *CREDIT: WOLTER PEETERS*

Alexander said the public investment required to rebuild Willow Grove – estimated to be \$10 million – would be far better invested in conserving existing heritage places such as [the art deco Roxy Theatre](#).

"Parramatta has a remarkable heritage, but with the loss of so many heritage buildings, that unique history is fast diminishing," she said.

“Instead of demolishing and creating replica heritage buildings, public funds would be better invested in conserving the significant existing heritage in Parramatta, such as the purchase and restoration of the Roxy Theatre.”

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Options to relocate the Willow Grove building include sites near historic places, such as the Parramatta Female Factory, which is subject to a business case for use as an interpretative museum.

“The National Trust NSW remains concerned that this will negatively impact the significance of the [historic] precinct and that it would be inappropriate to place a replica building on this site or others like it,” Alexander said.

The idea that a rebuilt Willow Grove would shelter women fleeing domestic violence was raised by Powerhouse’s president Peter Collins at a parliamentary inquiry in March during which he praised the building’s meticulous dismantlement.

North Parramatta Residents Action Group spokesperson Suzette Meade, who led public protests to save Willow Grove, said a women’s shelter needed a new purpose-built building.

“NPRAG suggests the \$10 million to ‘FrankenGrove’ should be used to build a purpose-built woman’s shelter in Parramatta and name it the Annie Gallagher women’s refuge in honour of the Parramatta woman who built Willow Grove in 1890.”

*The Sydney Morning Herald* has contacted Arts Minister Ben Franklin for comment.