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Perrottet government hits accelerator on Powerhouse redesign



By [Linda Morris](#)

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The Perrottet government has hit the accelerator on design plans for the \$500 million redevelopment of the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo, which is likely to close the institution to the public for up to three years.

At the same time, the government has admitted to delays to the public opening of the \$915 million Parramatta Powerhouse.



An artist's impression of the new entrance and public square at the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo.*CREDIT:*

Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, the award-winning team behind the transformation of Walsh Bay wharves and shore sheds into the city's leading arts precinct, heads a shortlist of five teams who will develop detailed designs for Ultimo.

Fashion designer Akira Isogawa and the Indigenous design start-up Yerrabingin have partnered with Architectus Australia and Durbach Block Jagers Architects to take part in the national design competition.

BVN whose architecture and interior design practice includes Atlassian Central, Green Square and the National Aboriginal Art Gallery has also been selected. As has Cox Architecture and Neeson Murcutt Neille whose team of designers worked on the multi-award-winning Project Discover extensions at the Australian Museum.

The winning architect will be named and contracted in December three months before the March 2023 election effectively locking in any new government to the \$500 million redevelopment.

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Arts Minister Ben Franklin

“We would hope that there will be planning approval by the end of the year when we will award the winning scheme and architect,” Arts Minister Ben Franklin told Parliament this week.

Franklin said construction would likely commence by December 2023. A construction period of two to three years is expected, depending on the complexity of the design and the build. It means the Powerhouse at Ultimo and Parramatta will likely be simultaneously closed to construction for about 18 months. During this period, the Powerhouse’s collection will be stored at Castle Hill, which has some public viewing opportunities.

Franklin said the winning Ultimo design team would leave a lasting impression on the city and reinforce Sydney’s reputation as a global cultural destination.

Powerhouse chief executive Lisa Havilah said the Australian design teams had been selected to create a bold concept for the renewal of the Powerhouse.

The announcement of the shortlist comes as a concept environmental impact statement has been released for public comment ahead of the national design competition. It provides a framework and building envelope for the Ultimo Powerhouse.

Though not prescribing any specific proposal, the statement and accompanying documents canvas a new public square, entrance and a multi-storey annex on the Harris Street forecourt.

Only six of 104 public submissions have backed those plans. Among the objectors is Lionel Glendenning, the government architect who adapted the heritage Powerhouse buildings into a museum as a Bicentennial project.

Only half the \$500 million allocated to the museum was needed to address the site's urban design issues, he said, and the design framework presumed the demolition of his 1988 Sulman award-winning work.

At Parramatta construction is running about six months behind schedule.

Lendlease was to have completed the design and construction of the \$915 million Powerhouse Parramatta by mid-2024, with doors to open by year's end.

Franklin told budget hearings the new museum would open by mid-2025 at the latest. He hoped Ultimo would be open earlier than 2028.

The shortlisted design teams for Ultimo Powerhouse are ...

- BVN and Oculus with OCP Architects TTW, Eckersley O'Callaghan, Transsolar Klima Engineering
- John Wardle Architects, Billy Maynard, ASPECT Studios, Bangawarra, Eckersley O'Callaghan, Atelier Ten and Urbis
- Cox Architecture, Neeson Murcutt Neille, Other Architects, Hector Abrahams Architects, Sue Barnsley Design and Arup.
- Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects, JMD Design, TCL, Sibling Architecture, Freeman Ryan Design, Atelier Ten.
- Architectus, Durbach Block Jagers Architects, Tyrrell Studio, Youssofzay + Hart, Akira Isogawa and Yerrabingin submitting under SPARK.



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