

ITEM 9. REQUEST TO EXTEND ACCOMMODATION GRANT TO AUSTRALIAN MARRIAGE EQUALITY**FILE NO: S116523****SUMMARY**

On 24 October 2016, Council resolved to extend the accommodation grants to Australian Marriage Equality (AME) for retail space at 122 Oxford Street and office space on Level 10, 307 Pitt Street until 31 March 2017. The timeframe for the extension was based on the Commonwealth Government's proposal at that time to hold a plebiscite on the issue of same sex marriage in February 2017.

Since the Council decision, the Commonwealth Government has decided not to pursue the plebiscite. However, debate on the issue of marriage equality is continuing. On 15 February 2017, a Select Committee released its report on the Commonwealth Government's Exposure Draft of the Marriage Amendment (Same Sex Marriage) Bill. The report identifies areas of consensus and areas for further discussion.

AME is continuing to campaign for marriage equality, and has requested a further extension on both of the current accommodation grants. AME has requested continued access to the retail space at 122 Oxford Street until 30 June 2017, at which time they intend to move to an online retail option.

In addition, AME has requested continuing access to office space to support its ongoing campaign for marriage equality through legislative change in the Australian Parliament. The office space acts as a base for AME's national efforts to build support for marriage equality, accommodating 17 volunteers, who work on various aspects of the campaign including media, communications, fundraising, and stakeholder engagement. After 30 June 2017, the space could also be used to store merchandise that will be available for purchase via an online store.

AME has advised it will continue its current campaign until December 2017, before reassessing its options for achieving change. It is therefore proposed that the current lease of office space at Level 10, 307 Pitt Street is extended until 31 December 2017 to enable AME to continue its campaign. During this time, the City will continue to work with AME to address the organisation's future accommodation needs.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve the extension of the current Accommodation Grant to Australian Marriage Equality for a retail space at 122 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst, from the present expiry date of 31 March 2017 to a new expiry date of 30 June 2017, which represents a value of up to \$13,274 (exclusive of GST) in foregone market rent;
- (B) Council approve the extension of the current Accommodation Grant to Australian Marriage Equality for a furnished and fitted out office space on Level 10, 307 Pitt Street, Sydney, from the present expiry date of 31 March 2017 to a new expiry date of 31 December 2017, which represents a value of up to \$66,909 (exclusive of GST) in foregone market rent;

- (C) Council note that the City will continue to work with Australian Marriage Equality to address the organisation's accommodation needs; and
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to amend the current Accommodation Grant agreements with Australian Marriage Equality referred to in clauses (A) and (B).

ATTACHMENTS

Nil.

BACKGROUND

1. The City of Sydney local government area is home to one of Australia's largest populations of LGBTIQ community members and same-sex couples.
2. Australian Marriage Equality (AME) has been campaigning for the rights of same-sex couples to marry, including in the context of a proposed plebiscite that will not proceed at this time due to a lack of support in the Australian Parliament.
3. Despite the lack of parliamentary support for the plebiscite, AME is continuing to campaign on the issue of marriage equality, including holding town hall meetings in rural and regional towns across the country and in all state capital cities. The co-chair of AME, Janine Middleton, has advised that AME's intention is to continue campaigning up to and beyond the next federal election if required.
4. Earlier this year, a Select Committee released its report on the Commonwealth Government's Exposure Draft of the Marriage Amendment (Same Sex Marriage) Bill. The report identifies areas of consensus and areas for further discussion. Marriage equality supporters, including AME, have welcomed the Committee's report as providing a clear path towards legislative change.
5. AME advises that it will reconsider its options for achieving change in December 2017, and make a decision how to take the issue forward in relation to the next federal election. To support its work in that time, AME has requested ongoing access to retail space at 122 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst until 30 June 2017. Following this date, AME is intending to move to an online retail environment. AME has also requested ongoing access to office space for the purposes of continuing the broader marriage equality campaign.
6. It is proposed that AME's current grant for office space on Level 10, 307 Pitt Street, Sydney is extended to 31 December 2017. This extension will enable AME to continue to have a base for its national campaign, as well as a space to accommodate its 17 volunteers who assist with media, communications, stakeholder engagement, and fundraising.
7. During this time, City staff the City will continue to work with Australian Marriage Equality to address the organisation's future accommodation needs.

KEY IMPLICATIONS**Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030**

8. Sustainable Sydney 2030 is a vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This grant is aligned with the following strategic direction and objectives:
 - (a) Direction 6 - Vibrant Local Communities and Economies – support for the marriage equality campaign is consistent with the City's vision for an equitable, diverse and inclusive community.

Social / Cultural / Community

9. The contribution of organisations such as AME is vital to creating vibrant and resilient communities. Supporting marriage equality contributes to ensuring equality and human rights in our community.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

10. This grant represents an additional value-in-kind amount of up to \$80,183 (plus GST) in foregone rent for Accommodation Grants.
11. The current market rental subsidy value of the Accommodation Grant Program is \$3.84 million in foregone revenue for the 2016/17 financial year.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

12. Section 356 of the Local Government Act 1993.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

13. The current Accommodation Grants to AME expire on 31 March 2017.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

14. Discussions have been held with AME in the preparation of this report.

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