

## Item 3.2

### Making Space for Culture and Creativity

File No: S051491

#### Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Many cities in Australia and overseas face the challenge of making space for creativity and culture. Rapid urban development, competing demands for land, pressures to maximise financial return and complex rules and regulations governing the use of land are all factors.

But it's a challenge we must meet because a rich creative and cultural community is not peripheral but vital in the creation of a strong, thriving and prosperous city.

Proximity to new ideas and new activities provides greater opportunities for artists, designers, architects, musicians, curators, producers, writers and other creative workers. And while our major institutions are anchors, we also need the seed-beds formed by the clusters of new creatives, the ones who refresh the cultural mix, forge new paths and who, of course, are also significant audiences for the major institutions.

As Lord Mayor, I've been determined to support these seedbeds of culture, whether by investing in major infrastructure like The Eternity Playhouse or temporary public art projects – and that's why as a city, we've elected to invest more than \$35 million in Sydney's cultural life each year.

We are employing all of the tools at our disposal, from planning and regulation to grants and sponsorship, to making use of our City properties, to foster a genuinely creative city culture – because we want our city to be recognised internationally for its cultural life, just as it is already recognised for its natural beauty.

And at a time when support from our State and Federal Government has waned, the City is currently providing roughly half of all government subsidised creative work spaces in Sydney through our creative spaces and accommodation grants programs.

Our **new plan for Sydney's nightlife**, currently on public exhibition, proposes the creation of a new 24 hour cultural precinct in the Alexandria industrial area. As part of the plan, venues will be able to apply for an additional hour of trading on the nights they provide live performance. The City's **live music and performance grants** program also provides an incentive to make unused and underused spaces available.

We've transformed the former Heffron Hall as the **East Sydney Community and Arts Centre**, opened the **Joynton Avenue Creative Centre** in Green Square, and turned the former Baptist Tabernacle into the **Eternity Playhouse**. The former Reg Murphy Hall in Potts Point is now the **Hayes Theatre**, Australia's leading home of independent musical theatre. We transferred management of the **City Recital Hall** to a new not for profit company, leading to its increased use and attracting more diverse audiences. The Sydney Fringe has used **Erskineville Town Hall** as a live performance venue every September since 2015, and **Glebe Town Hall** is used periodically for musical performances.

We also work with the private sector, encouraging developers and property owners to make their properties available for cultural and creative purposes. One early venture was the **FraserStudios project**, which provided residencies for numerous visual and performance artists during the construction of Central Park. We supported the inclusion of a new theatre in Darling Quarter, home to **Monkey Baa Theatre Company** for young audiences. And our planning staff worked with **The Sydney Fringe** to enable an Alexandria warehouse awaiting redevelopment to be used for live performances.

One of our most significant achievements was securing **five floors of new creative space** as part of the Greenland development in the Sydney CBD for a peppercorn rent, due to open in 2021.

We are pursuing changes that we can make to the regulatory framework to make it easier to use space for creative and cultural purposes. Many of these changes were proposed in the City's discussion paper, **An Open and Creative City**, placed on public exhibition in late 2017.

Council is however limited in the changes we can make. Numerous reports have identified changes that the State Government must also make to NSW planning policy and the regulatory framework. It should also be addressed nationally and internationally – the provision of creative space and cultural infrastructure is something most, if not all, capital cities are facing.

As a member of **Council of Capital City Lord Mayors** (CCCLM) we can work with the other cities to advocate for a national policy that looks at the impacts of the National Construction Code, the tax system and national cultural funding policies on the provision of creative spaces in capital cities.

The City is also an active participant in the **World Cities Cultural Forum**. The Forum recently released its latest Making Space for Culture paper, which sets out several models to increase creative space. The 2017 edition of this paper included several case studies, including the City's work in reforming planning policies to support creative industries.

### **A Shortage of Creative Spaces**

The Creative Spaces database has around 2,000 subscribers actively seeking space in our city. The highest demand is for studio and work space, spaces for creation and production and rehearsal space.

This lack of space reduces the ability of creative industries such as fashion, craft and industrial design, to create new products; it decreases opportunities for community cultural participation and inhibits the supply of uniquely Australian cultural work.

There is also a shortage of performance spaces, ranging from affordable small to medium venues at 200-500 seats, to Broadway-style 1,500 seat lyric theatres. This means small independent companies are restricted in their ability to develop new work. Shows developed by independent companies are rarely able to transfer to larger venues and expand their audiences. Complementing this is the shortage of affordable rehearsal space, particularly for small independent companies.

While temporary or pop up spaces can be helpful, they are not the answer - many artists, designers and other makers invest in equipment which is often large, expensive and not easy to move, while theatre, music and arts venues require longer and more stable access to build audiences and program effectively.

## **NSW Cultural Infrastructure Action Plan**

Earlier this year, the City along with many other councils, cultural and community organisations and individuals, participated in the NSW Government's consultation for the NSW Cultural Infrastructure Action Plan. The plan is yet to be released.

## **Legislative Council Inquiry into Music and the Arts Economy**

The recently released Legislative Council's Planning and Environment Portfolio report into the Music and Arts Economy in NSW contained five findings and 60 recommendations, many of which reflect concern about the creative space crisis.

The report and its recommendations extensively draw on the City's work supporting creative space in Sydney. Many reflect issues the City already identified in the development of our Live Music and Performance Action Plan, our Creative City and Cultural Strategy and our discussion paper, An Open and Creative City.

The Government is yet to respond to the report.

## **Re-open the Theatre Royal campaign**

There is currently a campaign underway calling on the owners of the MLC Centre to re-open the Theatre Royal which has been closed since May 2016.

The campaign is led by Live Performance Australia (Australia's peak body for the performing arts) and Equity (the actors' union).

A theatre has existed on the MLC site almost continuously since 1872. The previous Theatre Royal, which opened in 1875, closed on 29 April 1971, prior to its planned demolition for the MLC Centre redevelopment. Within 24 hours of its final performance a "Save the Theatre Royal" committee was established with community support. The campaign gained the support of Jack Munday and the Builders Labourers Federation which placed a green ban on the site. The green ban was lifted when the developers agreed to include a new theatre in the development.

The developers and subsequent owners of the MLC Centre have received significant financial benefits from this decision. The Council at the time allowed the developers to build an additional two square feet of commercial space for every square foot of the theatre. The total income the owners have received from this additional floor space could well exceed \$100 million. The current owners continue to enjoy this financial benefit even though the theatre has been closed for over two years.

While there is no legal requirement for the current owners to operate the theatre, they have a strong social, civic and moral obligation.

In a recent newspaper advertisement, the Presidents of Live Performance Australia, Andrew Kay, and Equity, Chloe Dallimore, referred to this arrangement as an agreement with the people of NSW and called upon the owners to honour it.

**Recommendation**

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council commend the NSW Government for its work to develop the NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan and request the release of the Plan as well as a response to the final report of the Legislative Inquiry into the Music and Arts Economy;
- (B) the Lord Mayor write to the Chair of the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors asking that our group of city leaders advocate for a national policy that looks at the impacts of the National Construction Code, the tax system and national cultural funding policies on the provision of creative spaces in capital cities; and
- (C) Council endorse the campaign calling on the owners of the MLC Centre to re-open the Theatre Royal to be used for live theatre performances.

**COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE**

Lord Mayor