

Resolution of Council

11 December 2023

Item 12.2

Let's Get on With Town Hall Square

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor), seconded by Councillor Worling –

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the following timeline of decisions and City of Sydney action to create more space for people in Central Sydney, including plans for a future Town Hall Square:

1982 - Doug Sutherland led Council resolved to acquire properties on George Street to deliver 'an extension of Sydney Square'.

1984 - Doug Sutherland led Council resolved to extend the acquisition area to deliver a 'future Park Street Square'.

1989 - Jeremy Bingham led Council resolved to extend the acquisition area to deliver a 'Town Hall Civic Precinct'.

George Street became progressively congested over the next 15 years.

2004 – Clover Moore was elected as Lord Mayor with Independent Team with a commitment to light rail.

2005 - a light rail plan was developed by Transport Planner, Garry Glazebrook.

2007 - Jan Gehl's Public Space Public Life report recommended a George Street pedestrian boulevard from Circular Quay to Central and three city squares at Circular Quay, Town Hall and Railway Square.

2008 – this proposal was included in Sustainable Sydney 2030.

2008 – the State Labor government proposed a ‘Metro Link’ to connect the CBD with the inner and outer city suburbs. It included a stop at Pitt Street adjacent to a future Town Hall Civic Precinct. The Council considered accelerating the proposal for the Civic Precinct, but the State Government abandoned the metro project.

2011 – the Coalition Government was elected, Gladys Berejiklian became Transport Minister, and the Lord Mayor lobbied for light rail on George Street in accordance with Jahn Gehl’s recommendation and Sustainable Sydney 2030.

2012 – the NSW Government announced a \$1.6 billion light rail line in George Street from Bathurst Street to Hunter Street. The City contributed \$220 million for public domain works. This contribution increased significantly to a total of over \$300 million when later the project extended to Circular Quay and Central Station.

When complete, the fully pedestrianised George Street will have reclaimed over 20,000 square metres of pedestrianised space with over 6,000 square metres more in design and planning (i.e. Bond, Margaret, Bridge, Alfred and Dalley streets). This is compared with the future Town Hall Square which will be 5,600 square metres.

The Council has planted 100 extra trees and provided wide, granite-paved footpaths, modern street furniture and lighting.

Importantly, there are people everywhere – on our seats, having conversations, on their devices, or just people watching passers-by; and

The George Street Pedestrian Boulevard has attracted \$8 billion worth of investment including businesses like Paspaley, Cartier, Louis Vuitton, Burberry as well as Ernst and Young and Salesforce.

October 2021 – Council unanimously resolved to approve the Town Hall Public Domain Plan for Sydney Square (between Town Hall and St Andrew’s Cathedral) and Town Hall Square and Park / Druitt Streets – it noted that the project priorities required further advocacy, consultation, feasibility assessment and design development in collaboration with Transport NSW to inform future capital works budgets to be adopted by Council.

June 2022 – Council adopted Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision with three linked squares at Circular Quay, Sydney Town Hall and Central.

May 2023 – Council unanimously resolved to deliver Town Hall Square after 2035, and to extend commercial leases until then and immediately develop a concept design for Sydney Square between Town Hall and St Andrew’s Cathedral. At that time, the City resolved to spend approximately \$35 million delivering Sydney Square upgrading 6,500 square metres of public space.

Jan Gehl’s recent visit in November was to participate in a workshop with other stakeholders to provide input into the planning for Sydney Square, between Town Hall and St Andrews’ Cathedral.

A future Town Hall Square opposite Town Hall is currently estimated to cost up to \$300 million (including property acquisition, rental revenue foregone during delivery, and construction) and will require State and/or Federal Government funding.

(B) Council also note:

The City is not the only level of Government involved in City planning, and decisions by the State Government - in this case the George Street Light Rail - substantially changed City priorities.

Council re-evaluates projects in terms of maximising benefits to the City and city communities. The light rail in George Street was recommended by Jahn Gehl as a city planning consultant as the best solution for the main spine of the Central Business District.

The pedestrianisation of George Street and adjacent streets is providing more than four times the people space (26,000 square metres) of the proposed Town Hall Square (5,600 Square metres) and is serving not just one area, but the length of the City, benefiting people and businesses.

Council also must be financially responsible, and the high costs of George Street pedestrianisation, including extended and associated works, has meant that other projects such as the Square opposite Town Hall have had to be put on hold and vital sources of revenue, such as commercial leases, have had to be renewed.

The alternative motion was carried on the following show of hands –

Ayes (7) The Chair (the Lord Mayor), Councillors Chan, Davis, Gannon, Jarrett, Kok and Worling

Noes (3) Councillors Ellsmore, Scott and Weldon.

Carried.

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