

Resolution of Council

23 February 2026

Item 12.9

The Future of Victoria Barracks

The original motion was moved by Councillor Maxwell and seconded by Councillor Arkins.

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) on 4 February 2026, the Federal Government announced its intention to divest Victoria Barracks, Paddington, as part of the Defence Estate Review;
- (ii) Victoria Barracks is an approximately 15-hectare Commonwealth-heritage-listed sandstone precinct established in the 1840s and one of the most significant intact military sites in Australia;
- (iii) the Defence Strategic Review stated that the Defence estate must be “fit for purpose” and that properties with historic legacy but limited contemporary strategic relevance may require rationalisation;
- (iv) Defence has previously indicated that while the functions and units based at Victoria Barracks are critically important, they are not inherently tied to that specific geographic location;
- (v) despite this, the site is one of Sydney’s most significant heritage sites, a symbol of 175 years of military service and an integral part of Australia’s defence history. It has both national and local heritage listing;
- (vi) Victoria Barracks is still owned by the Federal Government. It is operated by the Australian Defence Force;
- (vii) in anticipation of potential divestment, Council resolved in November 2024 to undertake community engagement and develop Guiding Principles for the future of the site;

- (viii) in March 2025, City of Sydney staff met with Department of Defence staff to discuss the development of the Guiding Principles. City staff extended an invitation to formally collaborate which was not possible at the time, being in advance of any decision;
- (ix) the City received 1,092 pieces of feedback through that engagement process. The Engagement Outcomes Report demonstrates strong community support for maximising public accessibility, enhancing green open space and maintaining the site in public ownership;
- (x) Council subsequently endorsed the following eight Guiding Principles to guide any future transformation of the site:
 - 1. Conserving and enhancing heritage and military significance.
 - 2. Maximising public accessibility and maintain public ownership.
 - 3. Enhancing and expanding green open space.
 - 4. Prioritising cultural and community uses.
 - 5. Incorporating diverse residential development including public housing.
 - 6. Encouraging compatible and viable commercial uses.
 - 7. Supporting resilience and environmental sustainability.
 - 8. Careful planning, implementation and management.
- (xi) in December 2025, the Lord Mayor sent a copy of the Guiding Principles to the Minister for Defence Richard Marles with an invitation to further discuss should divestment be contemplated.
- (xii) the Assistant Minister for Defence responded on 20 February 2026. He said the Government is committed to preserving the site's historical significance and enhancing public access. He also said the Minister for Finance will lead the divestment process who will explore options to manage heritage obligations as a condition of sale with future owners.
- (xiii) the Planning Institute of Australia has emphasised that surplus Defence land should be subject to coordinated, strategic planning processes prior to divestment or redevelopment to ensure long-term public value, infrastructure alignment and good urban outcomes;
- (xiv) across Australia and internationally, former military sites have been successfully transformed through strategic planning into major civic precincts;
- (xv) the rezoning of a site of this scale and complexity requires comprehensive technical investigation, including heritage conservation, infrastructure capacity, transport, sustainability, open space provision, housing feasibility and governance modelling. This would require agreement from the landowner to obtain full access to the site;
- (xvi) currently, the City of Sydney does not have any control over Victoria Barracks and is not the consent authority for planning of the site; and

(xvii) strategic planning undertaken prior to formal rezoning can:

1. Provide clarity to other levels of government and potential purchasers
2. Preserve public value
3. Reduce speculative uplift and land banking
4. Embed infrastructure, public domain and heritage obligations from the outset
5. Enable orderly, staged implementation

- (B) Council reaffirm its commitment to the 8 Guiding Principles endorsed for Victoria Barracks as the foundation for any future planning of the site;
- (C) Council further note that Victoria Barracks is currently not zoned for residential or mixed-use development, meaning any future transformation would require formal planning processes;
- (D) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to proactively monitor and engage with the divestment process for Victoria Barracks, which is being led by the Federal Government, and update Council via the CEO Update; and
- (E) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Federal Minister for Finance, the NSW Premier and NSW Ministers for Planning, Housing, and Veterans to request:
 - (i) they consult the City of Sydney on any future use of the site; and
 - (ii) Victoria Barracks is not sold unless the future use of the site is in accordance with the City of Sydney's Guiding Principles, which were developed in consultation with the community.

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

Ayes (9) The Chair (the Lord Mayor), Councillors Arkins, Ellsmore, Gannon, Maxwell, Miller, Thompson and Worling

Noes (1) Weldon*

Amended motion carried.

*Note – Councillor Weldon abstained from voting on this matter. Pursuant to the provisions of clause 11.4 of the Code of Meeting Practice, Councillor Weldon is taken to have voted against the motion.

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