

Item 12.9

Notices of Motion

The Future of Victoria Barracks

By Councillor Maxwell

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. The Minister has not yet responded;
- (xii) 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;
- (xiii) across Australia and internationally, former military sites have been successfully transformed through strategic planning into major civic precincts;
- (xiv) 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;
- (xv) 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
- (xvi) 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:
 - (i) commence scoping the preparation of a City-led strategic planning framework, including the technical studies required to inform a future planning proposal, consistent with the endorsed Guiding Principles, to be included in the budget process;
 - (ii) include in the said strategic planning framework investigation of:
 - (a) heritage conservation, interpretation and adaptive re-use models
 - (b) public access, public domain and open space opportunities;
 - (c) infrastructure capacity, staging and transport impacts;
 - (d) environmental sustainability, climate resilience and biodiversity;
 - (e) housing capacity, including affordable and diverse housing options;
 - (f) financial, governance, ownership and delivery models capable of giving effect to the Guiding Principles, especially sustaining long-term heritage management; and
 - (g) mechanisms to preserve public value and minimise speculative uplift prior to any formal rezoning;
 - (iii) proactively monitor and engage with the divestment process for Victoria Barracks, which is being led by the Federal Government, with a view to seeking opportunities for the City to play a leadership role in shaping the future of Victoria Barracks in line with the community vision embodied in the Guiding Principles, including through planning;
 - (iv) prepare a report to Council that includes outlining of:
 - (a) resourcing requirements;
 - (b) staging options;
 - (c) indicative timeframes; and
 - (d) governance and intergovernmental coordination considerations;for inclusion in the forthcoming budget process;
- (E) Council note that preparation of a strategic planning framework does not constitute a formal rezoning of the site, but ensures the City is prepared to respond promptly and constructively should a planning proposal pathway proceed; and

(F) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to:

- (i) the Federal Minister for Finance and the Federal Minister for Defence;
- (ii) the NSW Premier and NSW Ministers for Planning, Housing, and Veterans; and
- (iii) any other relevant stakeholders;

asking them to consult the City of Sydney on any future use of the site, and advising that the City of Sydney is exploring the possibility of leading a coordinated, City-led planning as outlined in this motion, and request meetings to discuss.

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