

Item 3.2

Supporting Haymarket and Other Businesses

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

The economic, social and cultural impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19) are being felt around the world, as well as in our City of Sydney local government area.

As of 5 March 2020, there has been 52 confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Australia, of which 21 are reported to have recovered. There has also been one tragic death of a 78-year-old Western Australian man, who was aboard the Diamond Princess Cruise Ship. Only six cases did not have a reported history of travelling to high risk countries – four cases associated with an aged care facility in NSW and the remaining two cases reported as health care workers at other health care facilities in NSW.

While there is understandable anxiety about the spread of the coronavirus, we have confidence in federal and state government health authorities undertaking their role in monitoring and advising the community of the risk and appropriate action. The City of Sydney will remain vigilant and continue to work with NSW health authorities to ensure the city and our staff are prepared for any potential further spread of the coronavirus.

However, to this point health authorities have not advised that people should stay home or avoid certain locations. They have advised that if people have returned from a country of risk, it is important they monitor their health and isolate if they become unwell, with any sort of flu-like symptoms, and contact their doctor.

NSW Health is also asking the public to be wary of false and misleading rumours, posts on social media and inaccurate reports regarding the spread of the virus in NSW.

The restaurants and businesses in Haymarket are reportedly experiencing a significant downturn in patrons, many of whom reported experiencing between 50 to 80 per cent downturn in trade due to community fears related to Coronavirus.

Specifically they cited the media coverage perpetuating the unsubstantiated risks of visiting Chinatown and areas with high Chinese-Australian populations. Businesses in Koreatown and Thaitown have also reported downturns.

The current Federal Government travel bans are having impacts on international students who are due to commence their studies in the coming weeks and who comprise a significant proportion of university students.

Senior business leaders including the Chief Executive Officer of the Haymarket Chamber of Commerce, called on the City to develop a plan to support the local business community, drive footfall to the Haymarket area and to assist in reducing the spread of misinformation in the community.

Over recent weeks, it appears that the fears in the community about the coronavirus will have a wider economic impact on our businesses across the city – including hotels. So we acknowledge the hardships of businesses in Haymarket, but we also know other areas have, or will likely feel the impact of a downturn in business.

The City will work closely with the State Government to implement measures to support businesses in the city, and the Chief Executive Officer will investigate ways the City can play a role in reducing the impact of any financial hardship. The City already provides the option of short term deferred payment plans for rates and the CEO has the delegation to wave fees and charges where appropriate.

Haymarket businesses also raised the aspiration for a formal acknowledgement of heritage significance of the Dixon Street gateways. The Chinatown gates have been an important symbol for this precinct for many years.

I am pleased to report the City is planning a heritage study for Chinatown, which would include assessing the gateways for listing in the context of Chinatown as a whole. This is the first step towards listing. If the study recommends listing the gateways, then the City would place the proposed listings on public exhibition for community consultation, if approved by Council as part of a planning proposal.

They also requested the City of Sydney advocate to State and Federal Government to provide additional support to local business communities across Sydney that are negatively impacted, and who are likely to feel these impacts for more than six months.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to work with the NSW Government to implement measures to support businesses in Haymarket and other areas, within existing resources, such as:
 - (i) activating City of Sydney digital and social media marketing channels;
 - (ii) providing information from NSW Health to assist frontline staff respond to queries from the public and reduce the spread of misinformation; and
 - (iii) hosting information sessions for businesses on City grant programs that can provide funding support direct to businesses and community groups to promote the district;
- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate ways to communicate to businesses the option they have to enter into short-term deferred payment plans for rates and other Council expenses;
- (C) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate other opportunities to assist businesses across the city, such as waiving fees and charges, and report to back Council via the CEO Update on actions taken; and

- (D) Council note that the City is planning a heritage study for Chinatown, which would include assessing the Dixon Street gateways for listing, which are of cultural significance to the community.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor