



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

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Submission to Future Melbourne Committee 2 April 2019

re agenda item 6.3 Queen Victoria Market Precinct Renewal Program
Provision of market infrastructure and car parking

From: Royal Historical Society of Victoria

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Introduction

The RHSV recognises the progress made on this issue. Thanks to the Lord Mayor's initiative of the People's Panels, there has been consultation and, as a result, the recommendations presented to the FMC represent a welcome retreat from the discredited Doyle Plan. We are especially pleased to note that Option A provides that 'all of the open air heritage sheds [will be] conserved, restored and enhanced in-situ' (p. 19, SGS Report, Attachment 1).

We set forth below our concerns (1. Positive Features and Precautions), our efforts to clarify the proposals (2. Fixed Stalls and Radical Change in Operations: Issues of Clarification) and our concerns with heritage issues (3. Fixed Stalls and Radical Change in Operations: Heritage Issues). We should point out that the first two headings are in a sense preliminary to our fundamental concern on heritage issues.

1. Positive Features and Precautions

We should not, however, allow, relief to cloud our judgment. Option A, as expounded to the People's Panel Briefing on 28 March, still represents a radical change to the market's traditional mode of operation. And many of the recommendations are vague and without justification.

It is hard to know exactly what FMC would be approving if, as the Officers recommend (10.2), it endorses Option A for the provision of market infrastructure. The only explanation of Option A is in the SGS Report, Queen Victoria Market Precinct Renewal Program: Updated Options Analysis Final Report, which is provided as an attachment.

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This report provides some specifics, some of which we support and others we oppose.

While we strongly support the restoration of the heritage sheds and the provision of basic services, as well as various ‘amenity improvements’ (10.6.4), we note that there is no explanation as to how the sheds are to be provided with basic services commensurate with heritage preservation. We would have expected that this blueprint for progress and discussion include suggestions as to the appointment of heritage specialists to look at ways of integrating service provision as restoration proceeds. On this basis, we think FMC should postpone approval until there is clarity about the path forward.

Similarly, we note that the use of G Shed for ‘loading facilities, trader storage, waste management and trader and customer amenities’ (p. 19, SGS Report, Attachment 1) is consonant with the People’s Panel Recommendations and, subject to design and heritage approvals, we would support this. The construction of ‘a new below-ground area ... within the northern Queen Street reservation to provide centralised waste management including a bin lift’ seems appropriate, but the proposed ‘lightweight canopy ... over this space’ would need careful consideration if it is not to impose a visual block between the two parts of the market.

We do not see the point of the proposal to transform the ‘existing at-grade car park ... into new public open space to support the growing City North population and Queen Victoria Market activities’. That space is variously referred to as Market Square and ‘public activation space’. Clarity is needed here before FMC should approve Option A. This space cannot really function as a proper park because neither structures nor trees can be installed without disturbing the aboriginal burial space. In any case, does Melbourne need a small park here? Or would it be more cost-effective to improve pedestrian access across William Street and to improve the triangle of land between William and Dudley Streets?

Is it a park that is really proposed or a space for ‘public activation’? Possible ‘activations’ apparently would include ‘farmers’ markets’ or the ice-skating rink of December 2018. Would these bring additional shoppers to the market? Recommendation 10.6.5, Preparation of a Charter and Design Brief for Market Square, needs to be subject to some open discussion as to the purpose of this square before FMC gives its approval.

We therefore urge Council to consider greening and extending the car park into Franklin Street and the Southern Development Site. In this respect, we think it urgent to clarify the standing of proposals to extend Franklin Street (‘New Franklin Street’). Professor Adams assured the People’s Panel that this proposal was now off the table, an assurance repeated at the 28 March briefing, but it is not clear from any documentation that its status has changed.

Subject to the above considerations, we support Recommendation 10.4, authorising ‘the administration to undertake more detailed design, logistics and costings’, provided that the administration enter into good faith consultations with stakeholders, including heritage bodies and traders, in both direct meetings and open public discussions.

The fundamental issue is that Option A represents a radical change to the market’s traditional mode of operation. Recommendation 10.5 notes that ‘the approved budget in the QVMPR Business Case (2017) includes allowance of approximately \$6 million for purpose built storage at traders’ stalls which will be designed following extensive consultation with traders’. The Business Case 2017 is the one which was discredited by Heritage Victoria. Option A, in so far as it offers any evidence at all for its propositions, relies entirely upon this Case, which was designed to justify the very strategy which has now been—fortunately—discarded.

That business case is cited to justify claims which appear difficult to quantify. Two examples:

- (p. 42, SGS Report, Attachment 1): *'Based on estimates of customer growth associated with a renewed QVM precinct³, there is potential for an increase in the number of people visiting QVM precinct from 10 million to around 15 million p.a. within 15 years of works being completed under each of the options.'* Would the proposals before FMC increase the customer base by 50 per cent between 2026 and 2041? How can we know that?
- p. 43, SGS Report, Attachment 1): *'Council projections show that the QVM precinct renewal has the potential to generate a net addition of 7,000 dwellings in the Market Core area over a 20-year period ['The Market Core area includes the CBD and the suburbs of North Melbourne, Parkville and Carlton'].* Again, on what basis can we know that changes to the QVM will add 7,000 dwellings across all these areas between 2026 and 2046?

These examples suggest that adoption of this report should be postponed until serious demographic and marketing surveys can be carried out to envisage what form of the market would attract the most people. These surveys should take account of the QVM's traditional role as a starting place for the integration of new populations with trade savvy for their cultures but without significant capital resources. They should be looking for new migrant populations that might be attracted to become stall holders.

2. Fixed Stalls and Radical Change in Operations: Issues of Clarification

It may not be apparent to the casual reader that Option A is about a radical transformation of stallholders' mode of operation, but this point was clear from Professor Adams' presentation on 28 March and it can be clearly gleaned from two Recommendations:

- 10.5. *Notes the approved budget in the QVMPR Business Case (2017) includes allowance of approximately \$6 million for purpose built storage at traders' stalls.* Professor Adams made clear that this involves fixed (or semi-fixed, that is capable of being transported by fork lift) stalls, with storage and refrigeration built in under the counters.
- 10.6.3. *Completion of String Bean Alley retail laneway.* This is a prototype of fixed stalls. It will not have escaped Councillors' attention that the RHSV made a strong submission to Heritage Victoria opposing this proposal and that, while we regret that Heritage Victoria accepted it, we note with approval that it was only on a five-year basis.

Fixed storage is also clear from an attentive reading of the following excerpts from the SGS Report, Queen Victoria Market Precinct Renewal Program: Updated Options Analysis Final Report:

- *[Storage to be] supplemented by under counter refrigeration and storage in Sheds A-B and H and I (p. 19).*
- *The new below-ground areas in Queen Street and the former G Shed do not provide for vehicular traffic, meaning **the rate of change of operations (particularly in respect to formalised logistics and storage activities) will need to be accelerated [emphasis added]** (p. 19).*
- *The new below-ground areas in Queen Street and the former G Shed do not provide for vehicular traffic, meaning **the rate of change of operations (particularly in respect to formalised logistics and storage activities) will need to be accelerated. These will require technological solutions to***

improve the transfer and storage of goods around the precinct, such as automated guided vehicles and robotic storage and retrieval systems [emphasis added]. The new operational areas will be designed with these technological advancements in mind while transitioning from current operating systems (p. 21).

This boils down to what has been a constant theme since the discredited Doyle Plan was first announced, the creation of fixed stalls. Under Option A, the traders will drop their merchandise at the Queen Street South Building and then transport it to their (fixed or semi-fixed) stalls by ‘electric trolley’, as fork lifts will be prohibited. Traders will not be allowed to bring their vans to their stalls. They will park their vehicles somewhere, presumably using up 600 of the 500 extra parking spaces.

This poses practical and economic issues which will not necessarily be resolved by appeals to emerging technology yet to manifest itself in reality. The most important issue is the logistics of 600 traders’ vehicles’ unloading in a narrow time frame each morning of market operation. There is virtually no reference to this problem apart from a vague appeal to technology: ‘the rate of change of operations (particularly in respect to formalised logistics and storage activities) will need to be accelerated’ (p. 19, SGS Report, Attachment 1). This is a slender thread on which to hang such a massive transformation.

No report to date, including the SGS Report, offers any justification that fixed stalls and the attendant ‘separation between the public and market operations’ (p. 13, col. 2, SGS Report, Attachment 1) would make the market more attractive and draw more shoppers. FMC should ensure that serious research is undertaken before it commits to this strategy.

This radical change is justified in part by claiming that there is a need for more storage. The Council commissioned the EY Report to assess traders’ needs. This survey, to which just under half of traders responded, found that, of Fresh Produce Stallholders, 42 per cent think they have the ‘right amount’ of storage now, against 44 per cent who think there is ‘not enough’. Of General Merchandise Stallholders, 61 per cent think they have the ‘right amount’ now, against 29 per cent who think there is ‘not enough’. Professor Adams mentioned in the briefing of 28 March that some additional storage will be required to replace the Franklin Street sheds, which it is planned to demolish, but this is not clear from the documentation.

Stallholders surveyed were not aware that providing additional storage would mean revolutionising their current mode of operation by not bringing their vehicles on site. The EY Report found that they depend heavily on parking on site: 57 per cent of Fresh Produce Stallholders require parking on site, while of General Merchandise, 29 per cent require parking on site but 63 per cent park a vehicle at the market. Of those who use their vehicle, ‘83% use it for storage’.

It should be noted in passing that if these vehicles have to be parked outside the actual market site, there will be some 500 to 600 vehicles looking for parking. This has not been factored in to the count of car spaces, but it would clearly use up the promised 500 spaces at the Southern Development Site.

The only other justification offered for this radical change is the claim that this has to be done for security because otherwise vans will bring bombs to the QVM. At the moment the traders have to get their vans to their stalls by opening time and keep them there till closing time. During that time it’s no more possible to drive a van onto the site than it would be under their model. This is just the latest pretext. Security issues have been a perennial justification for the Administration’s plans since the Doyle Plan was first made public, despite the excellent safety record of the market.

3. Fixed Stalls and Radical Change in Operations: Heritage Issues

The statement of significance on the Victorian Heritage Register addresses not only the QVM's built fabric, but also its 'social significance for its ongoing role and continued popularity as a fresh meat and vegetable market'. The market's cultural heritage significance is inseparable from its traditional mode of operation, which is that of traditional open air markets. It is today, broadly speaking, the same as when the market first opened: traders bring goods to their stalls in their vehicles, set up their stalls and get their goods from their vehicles. The introduction of fixed stalls will completely alter this mode of operation which, we submit, is essential to the cultural heritage of the site.

Council's 2013 Retail Plan acknowledged that "the market also perpetuates distinctive forms of trading which have their origin in nineteenth century practices."¹ We endorse that acknowledgement. We suggest that attempts to modernise the market and to bring it into conformity with current regulations need to be balanced with the need to maintain the retail practices that endear the market to visitors today.

Option A, however, still involves concealing market practices, as has been the case since the Doyle Plan was presented. This represents a retreat from the 2013 Retail Plan, which states that "Market traders will have the option of fixed stalls."² People do not come to the QVM in search of a modern, hygienic environment, "a brighter, lighter, cleaner, greener and more pleasant environment that is clearly historic, yet subtly contemporary."³ There is no shortage of modern environments. People come for the atmosphere, the workings of an open-air market, the original nineteenth-century prototype of today's farmer's markets. The proposal acknowledges this but constantly betrays its original and still fundamental aim: to "reduce servicing intrusions in public areas."⁴

Council officers often refer to European city markets, which more often than not have fixed stalls. But this is to ignore what is peculiarly Australian, uniquely Australian about the QVM. At the time of its conception, in 1878, Australia was accustomed to open-air markets at which stallholders operated in an ad hoc way. Unlike Europe, our climate then seemed (and still is) much more clement so that a closed market on European models did not seem necessary for fresh produce. It was simpler and cheaper to erect coverings and leave things to stallholders.

So FMC is confronted with a basic issue. Both the heritage of the QVM and its continuing popularity are linked inseparably to its traditional mode of operation. It is not and need not be an imitation of European markets. Its heritage value lies as much in its ambiance and that results from the traditional mode of operation.

On this basis, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria urges FMC, respectfully but urgently to postpone consideration of Option A pending serious marketing and heritage studies taking into account the market's social significance as indicated in its citation on the Victorian Heritage Register.

¹ *Melbourne's Marketplace Retail Plan*, p. 17, from "Queen Victoria Market Customer Research, Sweeney, May 2013," p. 12

² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³ *Precinct Renewal Master Plan*, p. 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.