



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

16 October 2019

Manager Governance and Legal,
Melbourne City Council,
GPO Box 1603,
Melbourne VIC 3001

Dear Sir or Madam,

RHSV Submission re

Proposed discontinuance of part of Franklin Street and part of Queen Street, Melbourne

From: Royal Historical Society of Victoria
Responsible Officer: (Professor) Charles Sowerwine, Chair, RHSV Heritage Committee
Contact: c.sowerwine@gmail.com

Introduction

The RHSV is the peak body for 340 Victorian local historical societies and has a long history of partnering with the City of Melbourne in our joint concern to preserve our heritage and to use it as the basis for a unique, vibrant City attractive to customers, residents and visitors alike.

This concern leads us to object to the proposed discontinuance because the purpose of the discontinuance is not pedestrianisation but the construction of facilities which would radically transform the operation of the Queen Victoria Market, with the loss of much that contributes to the visitor experience of this great tourist attraction.

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1. Queen Street Discontinuance Would Undermine QVM Heritage Attraction

The bland notice of discontinuance does not refer to the purposes of this measure, which is to implement the so-called Option A with regard to the Queen Victoria Market, in particular construction of the Queen’s Corner Building (see Report to the Future Melbourne (Major Projects) Committee, Agenda item 6.6, Queen Victoria Market Precinct Renewal Program – Provision of Market Infrastructure, 17 September 2019).

Option A, as expounded to the People’s Panel Briefing on 28 March, represents a radical change to the market’s traditional mode of operation. Together with the Queen Street North (Northern Shed), the Queen’s Corner Building is intended, as per the report cited above, to shift traders from bringing their produce to their stalls and operating from their vans to unloading their produce at these new facilities, transporting it to their stall by electric trolleys, and operating from uniform, semi-fixed stall counters, whose aim is disguised by their being called ‘Point of Sale (POS) storage’. This transformation of the market threatens all that currently attracts customers to the market.

Council itself commissioned the excellent report, ‘Queen Victoria Market: Intangible Values’ (September 2017), which highlights that ‘People are apprehensive about the potential “sanitisation” of the market’ (KEY INSIGHT 3), apprehension frequently ‘expressed in terms of the Market being “sanitised” or made to look like a “food hall” rather than a “working site”’ (p. 8). The report found that ‘the most common anxiety was around the Market being “cleaned up” or “sanitised,” and that this would diminish the experience of being there’ (5.3, p. 24). It is clear that the planned transformation of the market’s operation will lead to exactly what people have opposed all along.

The attempt to hide ‘back of house’ operations by central unloading and discreet movement of goods goes against the value of movement, which, the report found, are part of what shoppers and visitors value, including the forklifts which QVM Pty Ltd so strenuously oppose:

KEY INSIGHT 4. The Market never stops moving. Movement was crucial to how shoppers and visitors perceived the goods, produce, environments and other people at the site, with implications for display and interaction with goods for sale. This was comprised of many different elements: a mix of adults and children of different physical abilities and habits; cars, trucks and forklifts; trolleys, prams and scooters; bins and boxes; and other aspects.

Option A, however, still involves concealing market practices, as has been the case since the Doyle Plan was presented. 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.’¹ 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.”²

The heritage value of the Market is at the basis of its attraction to customers and tourists. It operates today in the same mode as when it began operation in 1878, with stallholders bringing goods to their stall in their conveyances, putting up their stalls and operating from their conveyances. The shift to central distribution and, especially, uniform steel counters in place of the current beloved hodgepodge goes completely against what is valued in the Market.

¹ *Precinct Renewal Master Plan*, p. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

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’. Visuals of this ‘Point of Sale storage’ presented to the People’s Panel show that they are in fact uniform, stainless steel counters. (We note too that the Business Case 2017 to which this recommendation refers is the one which was discredited by Heritage Victoria.)

Council’s 2013 Retail Plan acknowledged that ‘the market also perpetuates distinctive forms of trading which have their origin in nineteenth century practices.’³ 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.

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.

Thus the proposed discontinuance of Queen Street is relevant to heritage issues because the Market’s statement of significance on the Victorian Heritage Registry specifies first that ‘The Queen Victoria Market is of social significance for its ongoing role and continued popularity as a fresh meat and vegetable market, shopping and meeting place for Victorians and visitors alike.’ Its operation as a fresh meat and vegetable market is intrinsic to its heritage value, and that value is what underpins its attractiveness. Attempts to improve the market must build on that value, not undermine it. The world is littered with markets that have been ‘improved’ and lost their attraction and their custom.

We therefore call on Council not to discontinue Queen Street for the purpose of constructing the Queen’s Corner Building.

2. Franklin Street Discontinuance

Similarly, Franklin Street discontinuance appears to be part of the plan for a ‘market square’, which at transforming 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’. This space cannot really function as a proper park because neither structures nor trees can be installed without disturbing the burial space, which includes significant Aboriginal burials. In any case, does Melbourne need a small park here? If so, would it not be more cost effective to improve pedestrian access across William Street to the Flagstaff Gardens 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?

³ *Melbourne’s Marketplace Retail Plan*, p. 17, from “Queen Victoria Market Customer Research, Sweeney, May 2013,” p. 12

We therefore urge Council to consider greening and extending the car park into Franklin Street and the Southern Development Site. Discontinuance of Franklin Street would only be acceptable if linked to such a plan.

The fundamental issue is that Option A represents a radical change to the market's traditional mode of operation. On this basis, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria urges Council, respectfully but urgently, to refuse discontinuance and to revise its plans for the Market.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light grey background. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Ch Sowerwine".

(Professor) Charles Sowerwine,
Chair, Heritage Committee,
Royal Historical Society of Victoria.