



ROYAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC.

239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000

Submission Regarding Permit Application P35598

Queen Victoria Market, 65-159 Victoria Street, Melbourne (VHR H0734)

26 October 2021

The Royal Historical Society of Victoria objects to this application on two grounds, related to Criterion D and Criterion G as per the QVM Statement of Significance.

On the one hand, the proposed structures are contrary to Criterion D. They would introduce a totally different architectural form, contrasting with and detracting from 'the remarkably intact collection of purpose built nineteenth and early twentieth century market buildings' as the Statement of Significance puts it. Like other recent proposals for development at the market, these new architectural forms would sit uncomfortably with the strong and simple forms of the original sheds.

The original sheds 'demonstrate the largely utilitarian style adopted for historic marketplaces'. They are 'combined with the later attempt to create a more appealing "public" street frontage through the construction of rows of nineteenth century terrace shops along Elizabeth Street and Victoria Street. The proposed use of shipping containers (two double size and six standard) and steel truss constructions is at odds with both these aesthetics and would detract significantly from both.

On the other hand, the proposed new function would be a distraction from the social value of the market (Criterion G), as representing the principal characteristics of a traditional fresh food market. 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.'

The architectural significance of the sheds lies not in their own right as an architectural statement but in their openness and transparency. They were designed to protect and facilitate the gathering of sellers (today they are stall-holders), who set up their own mode of display, together with customers. It is the dynamic of these persons acting and interacting together as sellers, consumers, gawkers and hawkers, which constitutes the drama for which the sheds were designed as sets. It is the market's social value that makes it so significant.

We note in support of our argument the Executive Director's reasoning in the Notice of Refusal to Grant a Permit in regard to Permit No: P35216, dated 13 October 2021: 'The approval of the refrigerated display unit would set a precedent for other fresh produce traders within the Sheds that would lead to significant change in traditional display methods of produce'. This recognises that the traditional function of the market is a constitutive part of its social value (Criterion G).

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The introduction of a new use is, to be sure, not necessarily incompatible with the market's heritage value, but to preserve its social value any new use would have to be compatible with and supportive of the market's social value 'as a fresh meat and vegetable market, shopping and meeting place'. We submit that the proposed 'Testing Ground' is not so compatible.

Established in late 2013, Testing Grounds is an experimental arts space 'tucked away between the Arts Centre and the Australian Ballet Centre in Melbourne's Southbank', Creative Victoria announced breathlessly in 2017. 'Testing Grounds is a unique space, with a focus on work that is site-responsive. "One of the first questions we ask is, why here [3 minutes from the NGV, as the web site puts it]?" says Joe. "Is there something specific about this site, this location, these facilities, that allows you to do [this project], that wouldn't allow it anywhere else?"'. (<https://creative.vic.gov.au/showcase/co-working-and-collaboration/testing-grounds>). Now Testing Grounds is closed and Creative Victoria and the City of Melbourne propose to resuscitate it at the QVM site.

Legitimate questions can be asked about the viability of the project. Was it successful at its site in the middle of the arts precinct, the location 'that allows you to do' things you couldn't do 'anywhere else? The site is currently fenced off, locked and closed. It looks desolate. It does not look like a thriving success that will rejuvenate the market. This location, in the heart of the arts precinct, was the logical space for such a project. Why would it be more successful located within a fruit and vegetable market, far from other art venues?



Testing Grounds Site, 19 October (personal photo)

More to the point here, what will it do for the market? The rationale for all the changes introduced on the market site and to its mode of operation in the past five years has been the need to increase

the number of visitors to the market, especially those visitors who purchase food and goods. When Heritage Victoria has approved permit applications at the market, it has been on the basis that the Executive Director is required to take into account the ‘reasonable and economic use of the place’ and that the changes have been deemed necessary to ensure that use.

It is therefore important to ask whether a case has been made or could be made that the proposal under consideration will further the ‘economic use of the place’. The HIS gives as the ‘rationale’ for this proposal (6.1, p. 20) that it ‘aims to revitalise the car park space through community engagement, recreation and cultural exchange’. ‘The installation of Testing Grounds has been identified as a starting point for creative and economic regeneration at the market’. So the case boils down to ‘a starting point’.

No evidence has been supplied that Testing Grounds will attract additional shoppers to the market. Indeed, there is no evidence that it will attract people; the history detailed above could be read as suggesting it did not attract people even when located in the most propitious area for an arts space. And even if it were to draw people, it seems unlikely that those who come to look at or even to purchase experimental art will stop to buy potatoes.

We therefore submit that the new use will not benefit the market and indeed will be harmful to its social value ‘as a fresh meat and vegetable market’ (Criterion G). On purely aesthetic grounds, the addition of more bulky and opaque structures in an aesthetic designed for openness to display the social activity is clearly deeply problematic.

Figures 27 and 28 of the HIS omit most of the containers and minimise what is shown. It is clear from the plans that the containers will interrupt the view lines, looking south to the Franklin Street stores, and, looking north to the eastern end of Sheds L and M. We note again the Executive Director’s reasoning in the Notice of Refusal to Grant a Permit in regard to Permit No: P35216, dated 13 October 2021: ‘The absence of tall stall structures under I Shed is paramount to maintaining the visual setting of the place’. We submit that the introduction of more shipping containers poses the same issue.

QMV PL and the City of Melbourne have been proceeding incrementally to pile on new, opaque structures, from ‘temporary’ shipping containers in String Bean Alley and new buildings such as Trader Shed to non-compliant display fridges. This application proposes another ‘temporary’ set of shipping containers, this time incorporated into a more ambitious and more visually striking framework.

The application under consideration here involves yet more intrusion of visual blocks in a site whose heritage value is fundamentally determined by its openness to the market operation for which it was designed. It is time to draw the line and to act to maintain the transparency on which the market’s heritage value depends.

We therefore urge that the application be rejected.

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