



2011 Residents' Association Inc.

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PO Box 1513
Potts Point NSW 1335

12 September 2021

Lord Mayor, Councillor Clover Moore
Sydney Town Hall
483 George St
Sydney NSW 2000

cc

Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Jess Scully
Councillor Craig Chung
Councillor Christine Forster
Councillor Robert Kok
Councillor Jess Miller
Councillor Professor Kerry Phelps AM
Councillor Linda Scott
Councillor Professor Philip Thalys
Councillor Angela Vithoulkas

dasubmissions@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au Attention: Matthew Girvan

Dear Lord Mayor and Councillors,

Re: **Development Application D/2021/893, 28-30 Orwell Street POTTS POINT NSW 2011,**
commonly known at the Metro Theatre and/or the Minerva Theatre

We wish to make a submission regarding the Development Application noted above.

We are a residents' action group that advocates for residents and businesses in the 2011 postcode area covering Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay, Rushcutters Bay and Woolloomooloo. We have led and supported campaigns for increased public transport, to preserve the historic streetscape of the neighbourhood, to improve public amenity, and in support of many community projects.

Our members live in the 2011 postcode area and have history here. We have seen our area grow and thrive, but we have also seen it challenged. Throughout all, we have maintained our strong advocacy role to protect and improve the safety and amenity for all who live in, work in, and visit the 2011 postcode.

The Metro/Minerva Theatre is a building of exceptional classic architectural style linking the Potts Point neighbourhood back to the early part of the twentieth century, and as such is in perfect keeping with its locale. The surrounding buildings are a stunning showcase of early twentieth-century apartment buildings on the grand scale, such as Gowrie Gate, Franconia, Cahors, Byron Hall and Kingsclere.



Is there another precinct in all of Australia that houses so much social and architectural history within two small blocks? What a rarity that is, and how unique!

And the Metro/Minerva Theatre is the proud jewel at the centre of this crown.



The proposal described in the Development Application has, it must be stated, some positive features, such as the continuation of the building for some limited and small-scale live theatre, and the (for the most part) retention of the original façade.

However, the reduction in internal size to accommodate new bars, bar storage space, and back-room space for bar staff, and the resumption of part of the backstage fly tower for use as hotel rooms, is a great loss.

The developers state in their proposal that the theatre is too dated to allow modern day theatrical performances, and that under their proposal the theatre will never be able to present large scale theatrical or cinematic events (1000 seat plus) as it once regularly did, hence justifying their design proposal of breaking the interiors down into a number of smaller 'performance spaces', transforming the crucial backstage fly tower into hotel rooms, and the addition of a large basement nightclub.

However, Andrew Andersons, former NSW Assistant Government Architect, is confident that the building can be brought back to its former glory for use as a live theatre incorporating modern OH&S standards and disability access, stating, "*with proper planning, you can incorporate all of that.....You can have all the best that contemporary theatre has to offer*" (<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/embodiment-of-the-revival-state-eyes-theatre-to-secure-kings-cross-rebirth-20210908-p58ptl.html>).

As well the NSW Minister for the Arts, The Hon Don Harwin, has stated that a joint feasibility study into the Metro Theatre commissioned by City of Sydney and the NSW Government found there would in fact be "*sufficient space to be able to house 1,000 patrons*" (<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/arts-minister-hits-out-against-development-plans-dashing-kings-cross-revival-20210801-p58eu7.html>).

What a loss for Sydney if we lose the Metro/Minerva as a live performance theatre - on a scale with the demolition of the beautiful Regent Theatre in George Street, which is now nothing more than a footnote in the architectural and theatrical history of Sydney, having been demolished for a high-rise development and a Macdonald's Restaurant, along with many other fine examples of early twentieth century building design in Sydney.

If a similar fate were to happen to the Metro/Minerva, even something as basic as the loss of the fly tower, its future in large or even mid-scale live theatre presentations would be erased irretrievably forever - and at what cost to local and wider-Sydney history and its theatre-going public. Don't let that happen to the Metro/Minerva.

The current proposal before Council also creates several other serious problems:

- noise: late night and into the early morning due to the proposed trading hours of new bars and a nightclub in the building - this would be avoided if the building is returned to its original use as a working theatre
- the extra bars and nightclub in the proposal are doubly unnecessary considering the wealth of dining and bar options surrounding the building within just a couple of minutes' walk, including *directly across the road* at the Roosevelt and multiple dining options in the revitalised 'eat street' Lankelly Lane

- garbage collection: from the proposed new bars and nightclubs in the re-designed building, more garbage and bottle collections in already narrow streets and laneways (via Orwell Street, Orwell Lane, Hughes Street)
- parking: entry and exit to the new hotel, putting strain on already narrow streets (Orwell Street, Orwell Lane, Hughes Street)
- the construction/deconstruction/excavation phase: the proposal gives only a minimal description of the timeline involved for the major internal renovations and basement level excavation (to house the new 'nightclub') - what will be the noise, dirt and dust impact on surrounding residential buildings that don't have the benefit of air conditioning and are unable to close their windows?
- the impact of constant truck movements through narrow streets and laneways during the excavation phase on local infrastructure and residential amenity
- the loss of long-held district views for nearby residents as the hotel rises above the current building's height
- we are also concerned about the possibility of the theatre being converted into a massive beer-barn operation, or into multiple small bar or night club operations, should the 'performance spaces' in the Central Element development plan prove economically unviable

Saving and restoring the Metro/Minerva presents a unique and thrilling possibility to not only restore a classic working theatre, but also revitalise the Potts Point neighbourhood, and in doing so also revive and assist the performing arts industry in Sydney which has suffered so greatly over the past almost two years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The surrounding neighbourhood will also benefit from this revival, with local restaurants, cafes and bars becoming a focus for pre-theatre drinks and dinners, and post-theatre catch-ups and critiques. It is a unique opportunity for our neighbourhood and our city, and if lost, it will never be offered again.

Can you imagine the thrill and excitement for patrons attending a live event in a theatre that echoes with almost 100 years of history? It would put Sydney, and particularly Potts Point and Kings Cross, on the international map for all the right reasons.



Bayreuth has its dedicated Wagner festivals; London's Albert Hall is home to the famous annual Proms Concerts. What Sydney could do with a classic venue such as the Metro/Minerva!!

We urge you to reject the current Development Application and take action to restore the grand Metro/Minerva Theatre.

Yours faithfully,

Carole Ferrier

Convenor

2011 Residents Association (<https://2011residentsassociation.org.au/>)

on behalf of members and 2011 residents

