

3 May, 2019

La Mama Theatre - Statement of Economic and Use Requirements

With a rich history spanning over 50 years and a national profile, La Mama is Australia's home of independent theatre. It plays a critical role in the national arts landscape as a place for responsive, new, risk-taking work to occur. La Mama has a distinct artist focus and provides a unique audience experience. Treasured for its continued advocacy of those seeking to explore beyond the mainstream, La Mama champions artistic individuality and freedom, prioritises accessibility and celebrates a diverse community of artists and audiences alike. Providing the integral foundational resources and support for both new and experienced theatre makers, La Mama ensures artist remuneration, celebrates creative risk and pedestals the development of new Australian work. What La Mama offers independent artists is unique in Australia and we have existed for more than fifty years because there continues to be a great need for what we do. Each year we present more than 50 primary productions and though we have gradually increased staff numbers, demand continues to outgrow our operations.

La Mama Theatre's economic and artistic survival depends on the successful comingling of several key factors. This document has been prepared to firstly articulate how the proposed works are necessary to meet the current and ongoing needs of La Mama, and secondly, address the consideration under s.101(2)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017* which addresses "the extent to which the application, if refused, would affect the reasonable or economic use of the registered place..."

Philanthropic Support and Government Funding.

As a not for profit enterprise, a large proportion of La Mama's operating funds comes from Federal, State, and Local Government funding bodies. These funds are boosted by donations and, especially when it comes to capital works improvements, the support of philanthropic bodies.

In order to ensure the continued receipt of these funds, La Mama is required to make several changes and improvements to the building, to meet the requirements of the Building Code Australia (BCA), and to reinvigorate itself as a modern, safe, accessible, attractive and relevant cultural organisation. This is an overarching concern, and all of our proposals for the rebuild and restoration are crucial to meeting it. From an economic point of view, we must make these changes if we are to survive and thrive.

Restoration alone is therefore not an option that would allow the continued operation of the theatre on this site

Accessibility and Audience Engagement.

La Mama has never previously been a venue that provided universal and equitable access for all users. We need to adhere to building code, but also, we need to become fully accessible so that we can attract the broadest possible cross-section of the community, not doing so would have a significant negative impact on our future audience income. To address this, we are proposing the following additions and changes:

- 2 toilets at ground level, 1 accessible (BCA requirement)
- A lift to provide accessibility to the theatre.

Artist Engagement.

Due to La Mama's shared dressing room/office and lack of essential amenities, it has not been a very comfortable or attractive place to work for many artists. The changes we are proposing will create a more modern, flexible, technically capable, sound proofed theatre, which will provide for a much wider range of approaches to presenting theatre and ensure we continue to attract artists of all calibres. This won't just impact comfort and convenience, but also the economic viability of La Mama long into the future. Changes include:

- New external stairs and tactile indicators (BCA)
- A lift to provide universal access to the first floor (BCA)
- 1 accessible toilet for artists upstairs (BCA) with a shower
- Rehearsal room (increasing offerings for artists as well as providing an alternate group working space for staff)
- Mezzanine, providing more space and less competition for space, and a place to rest before shows
- Dormer window (providing ventilation as well as an aspect from the mezzanine)
- Improved theatre facilities - even floor surface, improved lighting and sound, double glazing and acoustic baffles to windows, potential for rehearsals and shows to be not interrupted by staff upstairs

La Mama's Cultural Significance and welcoming ethos.

La Mama's hospitality is unique in Australia, rare in the world and central to our operations. All the changes that we are proposing have been carefully interrogated, so that we ensure that they don't compromise anything about who we are, or what we do. In line with our priority of providing a hospitable and welcoming environment that breaks down barriers to access, we see the following as necessary improvements:

- Maintaining and improving an open space for public (stairs and planter seats to forecourt)
- Providing creative flexible spaces (operable doors for opening up of rehearsal room and fence line to allow for larger functions using forecourt as well)
- Improved facilities for staff - uninterrupted work space, variety of work spaces (desks, lounges, break out spaces, group working spaces) kitchen, toilet and shower

Safety and sustainability.

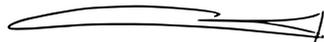
Central to La Mama's future is the creation of a safe and sustainable theatre and we have identified the following improvements:

- Fire rated box for paint store (BCA)
- Improved storage
- Environmentally focused improvements - water tank, water used to flush toilets and water the garden, solar panels, reuse of forecourt and courtyard bricks, raised planters and new trees, paint interceptor (BCA)

Partial demolition of the outdoor toilet

Whilst many in the La Mama community are fond of the existing toilet and all her graffiti, it has become apparent over the years that many are uncomfortable using it, given how close it is to where the packed-in audience are gathering. Additionally, it is very small and difficult for larger people or those with disabilities to use.

There are two major challenges in retaining the toilet in its original location, the first being that it would create a very narrow passageway in front of the box office, and the second being that it also narrows the entrance to the theatre. Our proposal is to retain the boundary wall and part of the returning walls and reuse the left-over bricks to create a platform for announcements and other creative pursuits.



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