

SYDNEY REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN 26 - AMENDMENTS FOR TEMPORARY SCHOOL AT WENTWORTH PARK

ULTIMO PYRMONT EDUCATION CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE (UPECC)

Ultimo Pyrmont Education Campaign Committee (UPECC) was formed in June 2015 out of community concern for the failure of the government to provide adequately for the public education of children in the Ultimo/Pyrmont area, when the Minister for Education reneged on his 2014 promise to build a school fit for the future on the Wattle Street depot site.

It consists of parents, representatives of the major Pyrmont and Ultimo community groups, and specialists, including a demographer, a former government architect and a stone consultant.

INTENT OF AMENDMENT

The proposed SEPP amendment is intended to facilitate the development of a temporary school on part of Wentworth Park, while the construction of the new Ultimo Public School is underway.

The redevelopment of Ultimo Public School is required to accommodate the growing student population in the school's catchment area, and a temporary school at Wentworth Park is needed to continue school operations during the redevelopment of the existing school.

SUBMISSION

The investigations of the Project Reference Group appointed by the Department of Education found Wentworth Park to be the most appropriate site for a temporary school. It is certainly preferable to the alternatives proposed by the Department of Education.

However, this assumes that a temporary school is needed "during the redevelopment of the existing school". The predecessor of the Project Reference Group, the Inner City Schools Working Group, also appointed by the Department of Education, unanimously recommended that the new school be developed on the Wattle Street depot site. The existing school could thus remain on its current site until the new school was available.

If more classrooms are required on the current site while a new school is built, it is feasible, and much less expensive and disruptive, to erect demountables on the teachers' car park, maintaining all the facilities of the existing school.

The section of Wentworth Park proposed for the temporary school is contaminated with lead and other contaminants. The Department of Education proposes decontamination to a standard acceptable to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). However, the reason the Department and the Minister for Education gave for not proceeding to build on the Wattle Street depot site was that the EPA standard was inadequate to protect the health and welfare of the students and staff. It is difficult to see how the EPA standard is sufficient for the temporary school (for three years – ie half the primary school life of the children) and not be adequate for a new purpose-built school on the Wattle Street depot site.

The current school has such limited playground space that children already need to use Wentworth Park for several sessions a week. The proposed area for the temporary school is smaller than the existing school, including smaller classrooms and less outdoor space.

Wattle Street is a very busy and noisy thoroughfare. Demountables on Wentworth Park will not be nearly as soundproof as the existing school buildings, or those of a purpose-built school on the Wattle Street depot site.

Annexing an area of Wentworth Park for a temporary school will reduce the open space for all other park users for three years. These include other school children, older students from a neighbouring college, people exercising in the park, and all those who walk through the park in various directions, including use of the footbridge to cross Wattle Street.

Our elected representatives in the New South Wales Legislative Council are holding an **Inquiry into inner city public primary school enrolment capacity and redevelopment of Ultimo Public School**. This inquiry, whose date for submissions has passed and whose hearings are about to take place, will include an examination of the proposed erection of a temporary school and demolition of the existing school. It would be improper for the Department of Education to be given a green light to proceed with erection of the temporary school while this inquiry is still in progress.

We therefore urge the Department of Planning and Environment

- To take account of all of the parents' and community's concerns about the absence of need for a temporary school on Wentworth Park; and
- To defer evaluation of this amendment until after the Upper House Inquiry has made its recommendations about the redevelopment of Ultimo Public School, the Parliament has considered the report, and the Government has responded.

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