



Metropolitan Public Libraries Association NSW

and

**COUNTRY PUBLIC LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION OF NSW**

## **Submission**

to

**Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works**

**Inquiry into the Joint Use and Co-location of Public Buildings**

---

**Submitter:** Anne Hall, Secretary MPLA

**Organisation:** Metropolitan Public Libraries Association (NSW) and  
Country Public Libraries Association.

**Address:**  
PO Box 424  
Bondi Junction  
NSW 2022

**Phone:** 02 9386 7777

**Fax:** 02 9386 7700

**Email:** [MPLA@waverley.nsw.gov.au](mailto:MPLA@waverley.nsw.gov.au)

---

Metropolitan Public Libraries Association NSW Inc.

ABN 13 084 586 207

President: Cr Beverley Giegerl Vice President: Cr Sonya Phillips Secretary, MPLA: Anne Hall

PO Box 424, Bondi Junction 2022

email: [MPLA@waverley.nsw.gov.au](mailto:MPLA@waverley.nsw.gov.au)

Website: [www.mplansw.asn.au](http://www.mplansw.asn.au)

## **Inquiry into the Joint Use and Co-location of Public Buildings**

### **Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Works**

#### **Submission from the Metropolitan Public Libraries Association and Country Public Libraries Association**

#### **Introduction**

The Metropolitan Public Libraries Association (NSW) [MPLA] and Country Public Libraries Association (NSW) [CPLA] represent the concerns of local government libraries throughout New South Wales, in local government forums, and, where appropriate, to other bodies and the wider community. Their objectives are:

- To undertake and encourage research and development on matters of interest to public libraries;
- To co-ordinate and encourage co-operative projects; and
- To maintain and develop strategic alliances with other information agencies.

The CPLA and MPLA represent Local Government authorities across NSW who have adopted the Library Act 1939.

In this joint submission, the experiences of Public Library Managers and professionals throughout the state have been sought. There are many examples of joint use and co-located facilities across NSW and a variety of issues and outcomes have been identified which may contribute to the Committee's deliberations upon the matters at hand.

In this submission, we address each specific term of reference making appropriate observations in relation to public library services.

#### **Terms of Reference**

1. *Options for retrofitting and adaptive reuse of existing state and local government public buildings.*

In response to this item, reference to the publication *People Places*<sup>1</sup> from the State Library of NSW is recommended. *People Places* outlines the various issues that need to be considered when developing new or modifying existing facilities for public library services.

In relation to adaptive reuse of existing buildings, issues surrounding the inefficient designs of non-library specific building can increase operational costs and create security issues for Local Government. Design trends and user demand for amenity within public libraries including efficient lighting and extensive use of natural light cannot always be accommodated in the adaptive reuse of older buildings for a number of reasons. Increasingly the need for comprehensive telecommunication infrastructure to support library technology is

---

<sup>1</sup> Nesbitt, Heather. *People Places ; a guide for public library buildings in New South Wales*. Library Council of NSW, Sydney, 2000.

often at odds with adaptive reuse of buildings, particularly those buildings that have heritage values.

The nature of the existing buildings considered for co-location projects needs to be very carefully evaluated. It is difficult to gain the same efficiencies for service provision in existing buildings when compared with buildings designed for that service. Factors such as internal load-bearing walls, upper storeys, floor load-bearing capability and conditions for public meeting places can all impact upon the effectiveness of redeploing existing facilities.

It should be noted that trends in the design of Library buildings and changing role of public libraries from housing collections to facilitators of access to resources is resulting in significant rethinking of the traditional approach to library design. Increasingly the development of community spaces, or “commons” and other publicly accessible areas to replace the village green are a large part of the design of public library buildings.

An additional issue to consider, encompasses the costs surrounding incorporating modern amenity in older buildings including access for the disabled and the significant additional costs that occur in retrofitting ramps, lifts etc to existing buildings. Recent private, commercial developments, are demonstrating that reconstruction is frequently more cost efficient and able to deliver a higher standard of design than re-use alternatives.

As public libraries are in the main, funded by Local Government, sustainable approaches to design are extremely important when planning buildings. Appropriate buildings must be designed to minimise operational and environmental costs associated with running air conditioning, lighting and other systems. Recent changes to the building codes and introduction of the BASIX system, while encouraging smart design and energy efficient alternatives, may exclude the use of Heritage buildings as appropriate reuse alternatives for local government. Due consideration of the sustainability of a proposed reuse is appropriate, both in ensuring the ongoing success of the facility over its proposed life, but also in ensuring that public monies are effectively spent.

Furthermore, usage studies show that public libraries need to be sited within easy access to parking and public transport. Uptake of library services, particularly amongst older segments of the population, depends upon access. A primary advantage of collocating facilities such as libraries is that greater access can be provided through the creation of shopping or administrative centres and subsequent provision of dedicated public transport interchanges.

2. *Options for the design and construction of new public buildings with joint uses having regard to environmental and community life cycle issues.*

The MPLA and CPLA strongly support the idea of joint use facilities whether in conjunction with Government or commercial/private partners. Experience of existing joint use and co-location, while generally successful, indicates that issues can arise, both the through the nature and operational management of the facility and the harmony of the relationship. Partnerships must be complementary in nature and consistent with the local community demands and the strategic objectives of each partner.

Many existing examples of joint use libraries or co-located facilities are already operating throughout NSW. We understand that a comprehensive listing of these facilities has been provided to the Committee by the State Library of NSW.

It is important to note that Public Libraries in NSW provide a seamless service to the community at large. Unlike school, TAFE or University libraries that are funded to support a specific audience and restrict access to their collections and expertise, public libraries are truly open to all. Whether formally part of a joint use arrangement with an educational institution or not, public libraries are de facto providers of resources to students at school, TAFE and University by the very nature of their extensive collections, opening hours and staff expertise. While Local Government is justifiably proud of the comprehensive network and services provided by public libraries throughout NSW, the un-financed support of other State and Federally funded educational institutions is not sustainable in the long term.

Joint use and co-location of facilities, while offering the *potential* of reduced development and operating costs for individual partners, must still be appropriately funded. A primary concern to Local Government surrounds the indirect cost shifting brought about by joint use initiatives, which place an unfair financial burden on one or other partner.

Scope for commercial partnerships, are many and varied and could include café's, book shops, mobile phone and vending opportunities. Such partnerships, while providing outlets for small and large business also increase the amenity for Library users.

As these projects are likely to have a local focus and thus not form the majority of responsibilities of the parent organisations, there needs to be protection for the particular projects when the parent organisations are responding to changed priorities. Agreements with review clauses are required and legislation may also be helpful.

Some further issues that need to be considered in joint use projects include:

- Planning – sound planning is important to the success of the venture, sometimes requiring consultation with the community and the active involvement of all key stakeholders –joint use operation usually requiring funding by separate budgets which need to be subject to regular review by all participating agencies.
- That appropriate joint use agreements are in place and include reference to an effective management structure. Existing, successful joint use models all operate within agreements that represent the needs and objectives of the participating agencies and representative community advisory groups.

### *3. Issues arising from co-location of state and local government public buildings with private buildings.*

Briefly, the following points illustrate some of the perceived difficulties associated with pursuing public/private options for building development.

- Governance issues and financial priorities. It is difficult to arrive at a level of service with conflicting or different overall corporate objectives.

- Costs savings either through the development and ongoing operational and maintenance costs should not be a motivating factor in the development of a joint use arrangement.
- Conflicting use and safety issues (public access to school grounds or vice versa)
- Potential conflicts with Competition policies in relation to services provided freely through public libraries and commercial services.

Possible solutions to these issues will vary depending upon the local circumstances, design considerations and the nature and scope of the governance agreements emplaced.

#### *4. Any other related matter.*

Joint use of facilities may not necessarily require a physical presence on the behalf of other bodies. Emerging and existing e-government services are currently readily available through the Public Library network including such services as are currently available from State and Federal bodies such as the RTA, DIPNR, ATO etc. Public libraries are vectors of access to a range of information and services and emerging as training providers to increase and enhance the existing information literacy skills of the community.

While these services are delivered through an electronic methodology, additional support to public libraries by State and Federal Government should be considered to further facilitate access to these resources.

In addition and dependant upon the nature of the joint use, increased training and skills may be required by staff to appropriately deliver a broader range of services.

In some circumstances the added complexity of services may well exceed existing award working conditions, and give rise to other industrial matters.

#### *Conclusion*

The Metropolitan Public Library Association and the Country Public Library Association support Public Libraries to continue to provide a range of community centred and empowering services. The associations recognise that appropriate joint use or collocated facilities can increase public access to services, and where appropriately planned and managed, can enhance the level of services available to the community.

It is essential that joint use and collocation proposals consider the varied needs of the individual partners and that appropriate management plans and governance structures are implemented at the early stages of development of joint use facilities.

The Associations are happy to provide any further comment or clarification of the points raised in this submission.