



Australian
Institute of
Architects

NSW

A Return, Not a Redevelopment: Town Hall Square

The Australian Institute of Architects today lends its full support to the City of Sydney's Town Hall Square, a civic space first agreed in the 1980's and now, at last, set to be delivered - fully funded, debt free, by the City. On behalf of the Institute, Kirby Rees, NSW Chapter Vice President, had the opportunity to attend a briefing on the project, held by Lord Mayor Clover Moore.

Led by architects Johnson Pilton Walker (JPW) in partnership with landscape architects, Aspect Studios, Town Hall Square is the missing piece in a vision, half a century in the making.

This long-held vision, originally agreed by City councillors in the 1980s, has been reinvigorated with foresight for what our city may require in 2050, when almost 2 million people are expected in the city each day; double today's daily population. The square sits at one of Sydney's busiest transport hubs, and meeting that future demands deep consideration from governments, architects and other built environment professionals about how we will share and reinvigorate the city's fabric.

The City of Sydney are leaders in this.

This project builds directly on the City's successful pedestrianisation of George Street, and completes a long-held strategy, developed by the City together with Jan Gehl, for three linked civic squares at the heart of Sydney, central to *Sustainable Sydney 2030 and other strategies*; providing residents and visitors alike, increased civic amenity as our city grows. Central to the outcomes of the proposal is collaboration and drawing on the deep expertise of the Sydney Design Advisory Panel, chaired by Professor Ken Maher AO.

A clearing in the trees

On Gadigal land, the design evokes something older than the city itself; as if conceived as a clearing in the gum trees. This future civic destination, a moment of pause and reflection of what this place may have been, long ago.

A square that is, in fact, a circle

What is offered to the public is not simply new civic infrastructure, but a return: land patiently and strategically acquired by the City over decades, building by building, handed back to the people of Sydney.

In its place: arcs of endemic gum trees, a chorus of shade and shelter, gathered around a central water pool that recalls the buried Tank Stream beneath the city. It is a place of togetherness - deeply Australian in its form and spirit - offering cool respite from a changing climate, clear sightlines to the city's heritage landmarks, and a walkable, human-scaled connection through the civic heart of Sydney. It will hold space for festivals, for cultural life, for public screenings, and for the ordinary daily business of people, simply being together in our city.

The Australian Institute of Architects commends the City of Sydney for its vision, consultation and public investment, sustained across decades. Civic spaces of lasting value are not quick to deliver; to plan, fund, design and build with integrity, takes time. This new civic space demonstrates that continuity of commitment by government produces enduring outcomes - places that don't just serve a city but define it. Long-term strategy and investment delivers outcomes that outlast, ensuring Sydney remains a liveable city for decades to come.

As Australia's cities grow, investment in the social infrastructure that sustains them must grow too. The Institute urges all levels of government to treat this project as a case study: proof that design excellence, backed by sustained public investment, creates places that will endure.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Carpenter

NSW Chapter President
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Kirby Rees

NSW Chapter Vice-President
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