



# Wagga Wagga's cultural, creative and economic future

Have your say on exciting options  
for culture and entertainment  
venues for our region



## **What public venue do you want in Wagga Wagga for events, shows and conferences?**

As one of the leading regional centres in NSW, Wagga Wagga needs facilities which provide both lifestyle and economic benefits for the community at a regional scale.

We currently have two concepts to chase for the region. The purpose of this engagement is to obtain community feedback on which of these concepts is seen as the highest priority.

Wagga Wagga's future is an exciting one, and with our population forecast to reach more than 80,000 in the next 20 years Wagga Wagga City Council is committed to improving access to regional scale infrastructure, such as conferencing, performing arts and culture to make Wagga Wagga an even better place to live.

## Introduction

Investment in contemporary cultural and conferencing facilities is critical to the continued growth of the city and will build on the region's attractiveness and liveability.

This document presents two potential projects – both resulting from previous community engagement – that will provide increased access to arts, entertainment, and cultural experiences for our residents while generating jobs and providing significant economic benefits to the community.

Both opportunities are relevant to our growing population and the purpose of this document and supporting engagement is to understand our community's priority. If there was only an opportunity to fund one of the projects at this point in time, which one?

## History

The concept of a major centre for entertainment and culture was first canvassed through the development of the Riverside Strategic Masterplan (2010) which identified that larger entertainment or conferencing events held within the city are required to be held outdoors or to be spread across multiple small indoor venues. This is still true today.

*Wagga Wagga City Council's Cultural Plan 2020-2030*, produced in 2020, identified the need for "modern, flexible arts spaces where new and existing groups can meet, create and interact with others" and an exhibition space for the sharing and preservation of Wiradjuri and First Nation's culture.

*The Recreation, Open Space and Community Strategy and Implementation Plan* also identified the need to develop a 'Civic Theatre – Performing Arts Masterplan'.

## The proposed projects will:



Attract visitors and promote event spend



Improve access to events and entertainment



Generate jobs and training opportunities



Drive Aboriginal cultural awareness and reconciliation



Position Wagga Wagga as a cultural and conferencing destination of state-wide significance.



Encourage investment and spending in our economy



Build the city's reputation as a destination for visitors and new residents



## Precinct

Both locations provide walkable access to Wagga Wagga's main retail precinct and its cafés, restaurants, and shopping. There is potential to complement existing entertainment, tourism, food, and beverages on offer.

## Funding

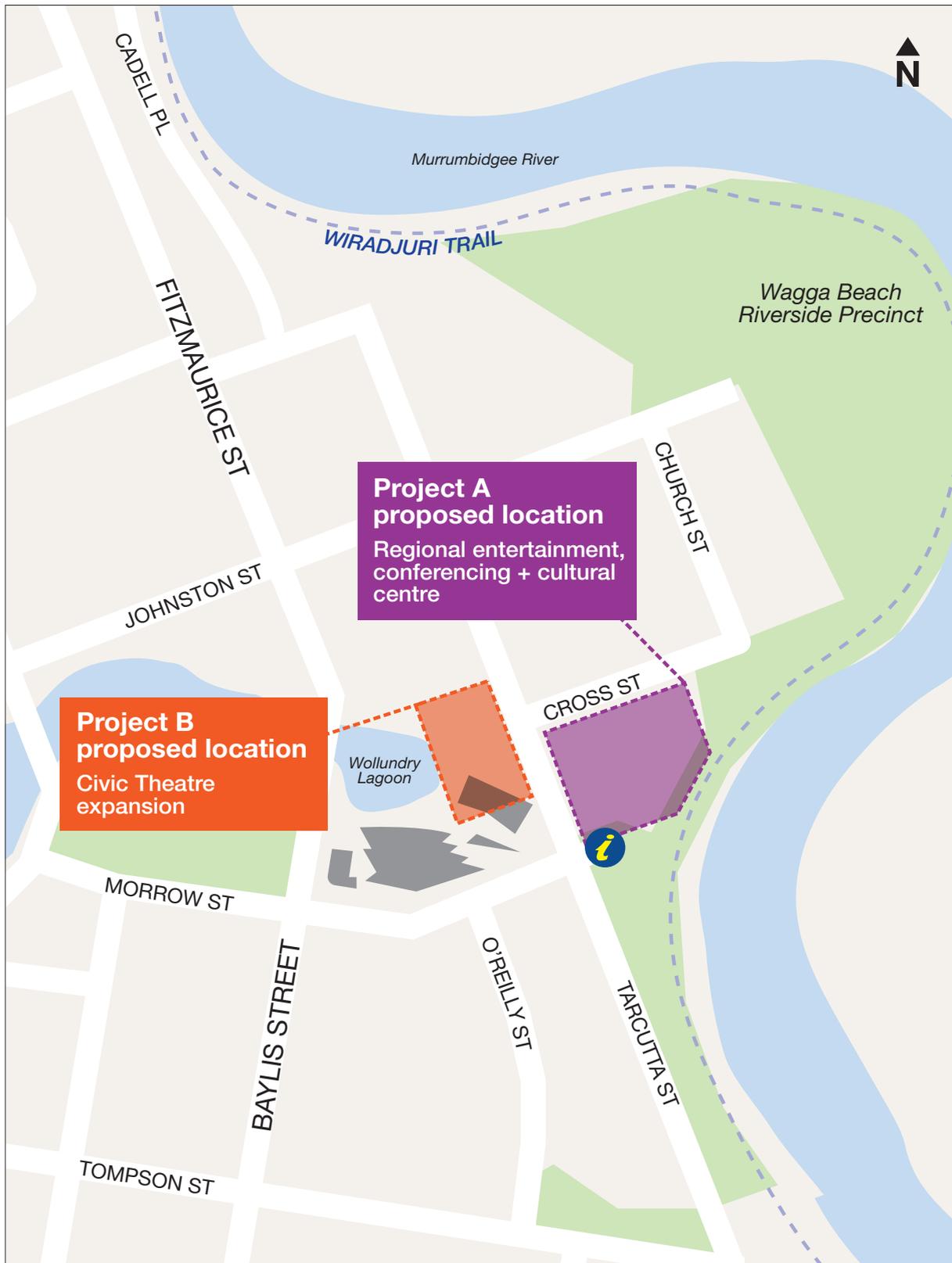
It is important to note that whichever project is pursued first, external State and Federal Government funding is needed to progress the projects to the next stage of detailed design. Your response to this engagement will help direct Council's efforts in seeking this crucial funding support.

## What is being asked?

Which of these two options would you like Council to pursue first?

**A:** A new regional scale entertainment, conference and convention centre, partnered with a Wiradjuri Keeping Place and cultural education centre. (Details on page 11).

**B:** An expansion of the Civic Theatre at the Wollundry Lagoon that adds two new venue spaces to support more performances, theatre, live music concerts and workshops. (Details on page 19).





# Proposed projects

## Project A: New regional entertainment, conference and cultural centre

### Introduction

In June 2023, Council obtained NSW Government funding for the development of a business case for Riverside Stage 3. The scope of this project was to develop a detailed business case for a major entertainment and conferencing centre incorporating a First Nation's cultural centre within the Riverside Stage 3 precinct.

The Riverside Strategic Master Plan was developed in 2009 following extensive consultation with the community. This master plan is now at the final stage of development with Wiradjuri Reserve, Hampden Bridge (Stage 1) and most recently the delivery of a major regional playground and outdoor events spaces at Wagga Beach (Stage 2) now completed.

The final stage of the plan proposed a major community facility (Riverside Stage 3) with potential for conferencing (800-1200 delegates), a First Nation's facility and Keeping Place. A major public plaza and community outdoor space was also proposed for this precinct with strong links to the Civic Centre and CBD.



Above: Bird's eye view of proposed project

Left: Concept artwork rendering of main entrance to entertainment and conferencing venue



*Concept artwork of entertainment and conferencing centre and Tarcutta Street footbridge.*



*Concept artwork of entertainment and conferencing centre (view from Cross Street).*

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Major entertainment and conferencing venue and a First Nation's cultural centre.

## Details

The project will transform the current Cross Street carpark site into a new regional scale cultural, business conferencing and entertainment precinct.

The project will complete the last remaining section of Riverside and will provide:

- A 5000-person standing capacity indoor venue – ideal for live entertainment – created by removable seating technologies.
- Variable capacity convention space seating from 800 to 1200 attendees to attract convention and trade shows providing opportunity to attract business events including conferences, seminars, workshops and receptions.
- A major, regional First Nation's cultural centre with a dedicated keeping place to tell the stories of the Wiradjuri people with educational and visitor experiences focused on the Wiradjuri First Nations.

The entertainment and conferencing venue will attract and host concerts, business conferences, trade shows and exhibitions and provide a premier space for gala dinners and award nights. The venue will be designed with retractable seating and interconnecting operable and acoustically treated walls, providing versatile spaces which will cater for a range of functions.

The cultural centre will be a vibrant, nationally recognised hub and include spaces for workshops, exhibitions, dance performances, retail and a cafe adjoining the levee bank. The centre will incorporate the existing 200 seat Riverina Playhouse.

The project will create regionally significant precinct that will:

- Provide residents with access to entertainment and live music experiences that are not currently on offer.
- Create new markets for business in conventions, conferences and trade shows, which increase local spend.
- Fill the gap in indoor venues with capacity that can reach over 1000 and up to 5000 standing to service the region's growing community and visitor opportunities.
- Increase recognition of the value of our First Nations heritage, provide opportunities for aboriginal cultural tourism experiences and support job creation.
- Support increased educational and training pathways and create local jobs from entry level to professional in hospitality, events, tourism, and the arts.
- Attract touring artists of national and potentially international acclaim.

The site includes 330 car parking spaces at ground level (the current number of car spaces at the Cross Street carpark is 225).



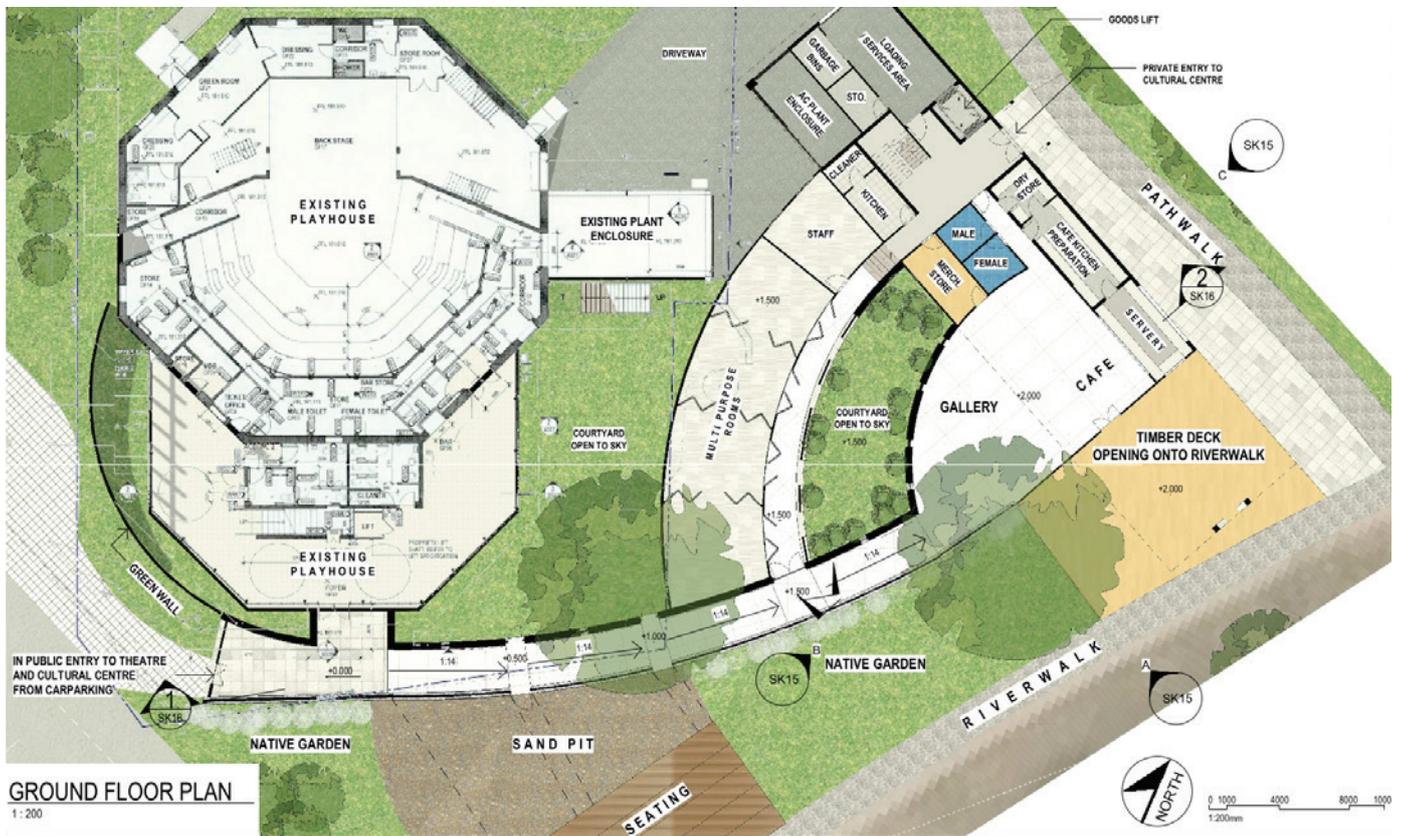
Concept artwork of First Nation's cultural centre (view from levee bank).



Concept artwork of First Nation's cultural centre.



Elevation drawings of First Nation's cultural centre



Ground floor plan of First Nation's cultural centre



CIVIC THEATRE



Modern, flexible arts spaces where new and existing groups can meet, create and interact with others.

## Project B: Expansion of the Civic Theatre

### Introduction

The Civic Theatre is a 491-seat venue that opened in June 1963 when Wagga Wagga was a country town with a population of 23,000. A masterplan has been created to explore expanding the theatre by adding two more spaces, one with 328 seats and the other with 119 seats, including an option to open up to the adjoining park to cater to a larger audience.

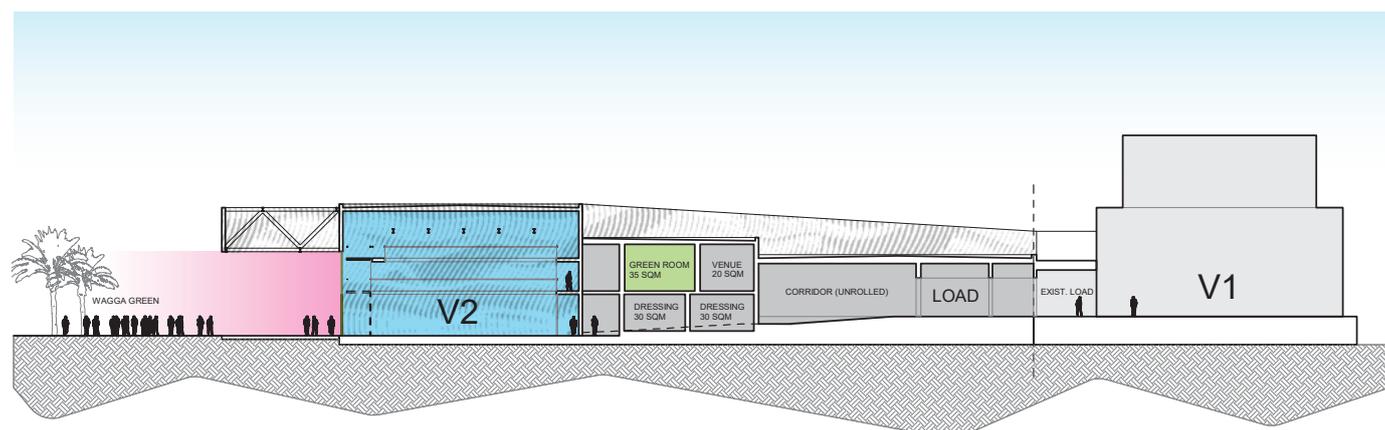
Over the last 60 years it has presented thousands of concerts, civic ceremonies, community and touring performances, and special events, while remaining virtually unchanged.

The theatre's 'one size fits all' design no longer meets the needs of the diverse touring schedule and performance formats it hosts. The single, inflexible space does not suit many community groups or live music events and limits the type of performances that can be offered in our city.

The Civic Theatre is often booked out for performances 18 months in advance, which means Wagga Wagga misses out on hundreds of live acts and events due to space limitations. The theatre is the only single stage Council venue left in Regional NSW and the demand for a variety of spaces, large and small has become increasingly evident through the demand from agents, community groups and touring organisations.

The need for "modern, flexible arts spaces where new and existing groups can meet, create and interact with others" and an expansion of the Civic Theatre was recommended in the *Wagga Wagga City Council Cultural Plan 2020-2030*.

The proposed expansion will attract more live music and events, encourage more participation, provide facilities and support for creatives, boost our night-time economy, and provide infrastructure to support the current and future needs of our city.



Left: Concept artwork rendering

Above: Elevation drawing



*Concept artwork of Civic Theatre expansion - aerial view.*



*Concept artwork of Civic Theatre expansion - view from Wollundry Lagoon.*

## Details

The Civic Theatre Masterplan includes two additional performance and event spaces in addition to the current 491 fixed-seat theatre, indoor/outdoor festival/concert options and a new bar overlooking the lagoon. All of this increases the capacity of the theatre on any one night, boosting night-time economy in a bustling performing arts centre.

The proposal will also expand on the usability of the Basement Theatre where Wagga Wagga School of Arts Community Theatre (SoACT) is located.

The master plan proposal includes:

### **Venue 1 - The original Civic Theatre would maintain its 491-seat auditorium and much-loved historic facade.**

- Inclusion of the world class Electro Acoustic System in each proposed new space, ensuring perfect acoustic conditions for all performance types at the flick of a switch
- A new foyer added with a lift and accessible toilet included, and a full internal refurbishment for the basement theatre, home of SoACT.
- A new bar overlooking the Wollundry Lagoon, internal foyers, communal spaces, and a commercial kitchen facility will be integrated into the expanded Theatre to support a purpose-built arts centre.
- An increase in training opportunities to create local jobs in events, arts, hospitality, and technical roles.

### **Venue 2 - A large new performance venue:**

- A 328-seat space to present theatre, live music, intimate performances over 2 levels.
- Accommodating 774 people for a standing live music concert or cocktail style event
- Gala dinners for up to 270 people
- A large window/wall to its northern side which can be opened to cater to a larger audience.

### **Venue 3 – A smaller theatre space overlooking the Wollundry Lagoon:**

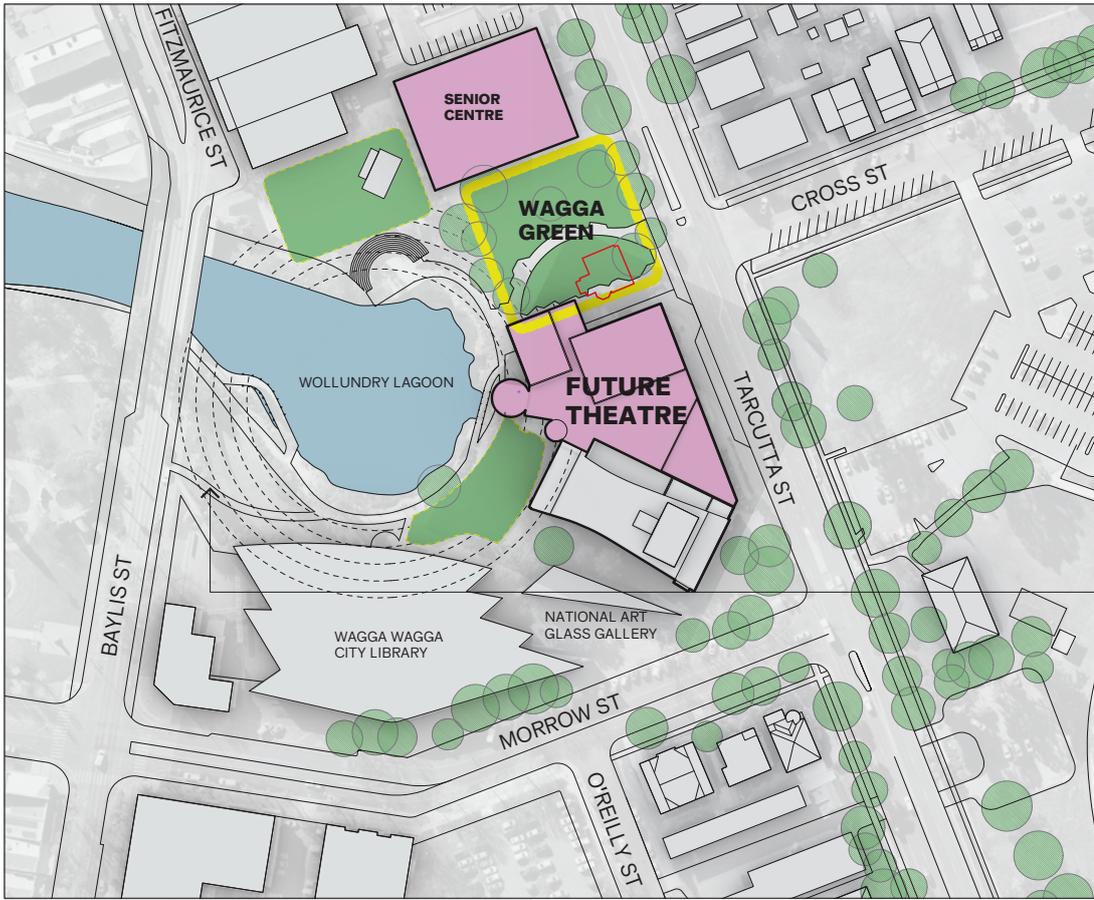
- 119 seated capacity venue to support intimate theatre and music performances, Wagga Wagga's young musicians, workshops, rehearsals, seminars and special events.
- It can accommodate up to 200 people for a cocktail-style event.



*Concept artwork of Civic Theatre expansion - view from Tarcutta Street.*



*Concept artwork of Civic Theatre expansion - side view.*



Top view of proposed expansion



Existing site



Proposed expansion

## Key points of comparison

Element / Objective	Project A: New regional entertainment and cultural centre	Project B: Expansion of the Civic Theatre
Overview	A new regional entertainment and conferencing venue with configurable space options through interconnected operable walls and acoustically treated spaces and a First Nation's cultural centre and keeping place located at Riverside.	An expansion of the Civic Theatre at the Wollundry Lagoon that adds two new venue spaces to support theatre, performances, live music and workshops (referred to as Venue 2 & 3).
Estimated construction costs (as at today's rates)	\$102.5 million (to be secured through State and Federal funding)	\$55.6 million (to be secured through State and Federal funding)
Type of events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entertainment / Live Music: 5000 people standing</li> <li>• Business conventions / conferences: caters to all conference sizes, seats up to 1200 theatre style, 800 banquet.</li> <li>• Tradeshows / exhibition space: large scale tradeshows to intimate showcases.</li> <li>• Large community events e.g. school concerts and end-of-year awards nights</li> <li>• National meetings of key industry associations</li> <li>• Cultural tours, educational programs and cultural dance performances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Venue 1: Maintain 492 seats in the current auditorium.</li> <li>• Venue 2: Live music / festivals: 328 people seated / 774 people standing. Gala dinners: 270 people. Large retractable window/wall for indoor/outdoor events on the lagoon.</li> <li>• Venue 3: Intimate gigs and events: 119 people seated / 200 people standing.</li> <li>• Total capacity across three venues increases from 491 to over 1,500.</li> </ul>
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates the largest entertainment and conference facility in southern NSW, creating new markets for conventions, conferences, trade shows, the arts, and creative sectors.</li> <li>• Creates a hub for education and training for the arts, hospitality, and cultural sectors while building the region's profile as a leader in cultural tourism.</li> <li>• Contributes to the liveability of our city by providing residents access to entertainment and live music experiences that are not currently on offer.</li> <li>• Increases recognition of the value of our First Nations heritage, provides opportunities for aboriginal cultural tourism experiences and supports job creation.</li> <li>• Positions the region as a cultural destination of state-wide significance with Wagga Wagga as the gateway, drawing visitors and tourism to the region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activates the Wollundry foreshore to deliver more live entertainment and festival style indoor/outdoor events.</li> <li>• Enables the Civic Theatre to present stand-up live music gigs for 774 patrons.</li> <li>• Boosts the city's night life and visitor economy for the Central Business District as a whole.</li> <li>• Contributes to the liveability of our city as a real alternative to metropolitan living.</li> <li>• Provides different sized venues that are affordable for community use, such as workshops, meetings, conferences and events.</li> <li>• Creates training and career opportunities for events, arts, hospitality and technical employees.</li> <li>• Expands an existing facility under the one roof, providing for efficiencies in the provision of technical services, bar and front-of-house staffing.</li> </ul>



# Have your say

## The question:

**Which of these two options would you like Council to pursue first?**

**A**

**A new regional scale entertainment, conference and convention centre**, partnered with a Wiradjuri Keeping Place and cultural education centre. (Details on page 9).

**B**

**An expansion of the Civic Theatre** at the Wollundry Lagoon that adds two new venue spaces to support more performances, theatre, live music concerts and workshops. (Details on page 15).



## Submit feedback

Read more about the two proposals, see some artists' impressions, and complete the survey by visiting:

[haveyoursay.wagga.nsw.gov.au](https://haveyoursay.wagga.nsw.gov.au)

