

Timeline for the UTAS Forestry Building project (including the Freedom Furniture Building/Timberyards)

(This Timeline includes material relevant to UTAS' cost and completion date estimates)

30 November 2018 – UTAS purchased Forestry Building at 83 Melville Street for \$15.008m.¹

29 October 2020 - reference in UTAS Council minutes:

“Council delegated authority to the Vice-Chancellor to execute contracts (subject to appropriate legal and financial advice) for the refurbishment of:

- the Forestry building (estimated value \$ [redacted])”²

5 March 2021 – reference in UTAS Academic Senate minutes:

“Woods Baggott Architects have been appointed for the refurbishment of the former Forestry Building on Melville Street and are commencing engagement in Q1 2021 with the building targeted for delivery for Semester 2 2022.”

[NB: The 29 October 2020 and 5 March 2021 entries appear to have contemplated a Forestry Building project that did not include the Freedom Furniture Building. I therefore do not consider the Semester 2 2022 completion date estimate as relevant to the current Forestry Building project.]

25 June 2021 – reference in UTAS Council minutes:

“... A tender for the works and the development application submission both planned for quarter three 2021....

“Item 4.3 * Report on Forestry Building Works - Motion 25-06-2021_UC_10575-9707

Council noted the preliminary design status for the **Forestry and Freedom Building** sites in Hobart CBD.”³ [my bolding]

2 July 2021 – UTAS purchased the Freedom Furniture Building (Timberyards) site at 80 Brisbane Street for 8.99m.⁴

10 September 2021 – reference in UTAS Council minutes:

“Item 4.1 Contract for the refurbishment of the Forestry Building – Motions:

¹ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/75807/230630-UTAS-QON-Response.pdf , p6

² https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1634244/University-Council-Minutes-2019-2022-Redacted.pdf, p167

³ https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1634244/University-Council-Minutes-2019-2022-Redacted.pdf, pp216-217

⁴ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/75807/230630-UTAS-QON-Response.pdf, p2

10-09-2021_UC_15827-10076

Council delegated its authority to the Vice-Chancellor, subject to appropriate financial and legal advice, to negotiate and execute a construction contract **of up to \$90M** for the redevelopment of the **former Forestry and Freedom buildings** in Hobart ('Forestry Project), with oversight of the 2-part process (through to the appointment of the contractor for the main construction works) to be provided by a sub-committee of Council comprising two Council members (Chancellor and Chair of the Strategic Resourcing Committee).

10-09-2021_UC_15827-10077

Council delegated its authority to the Chief Operating Officer to approve variations to the contract that do not materially alter the original contract.”⁵ [my bolding]

3 December 2021 – reference in UTAS Council minutes:

“Item 5.3 * Forestry Project Status Update – Motions:

03-12-2021_UC_16399-10437

Council noted that the construction cost estimate for the Forestry and Timber Yard’s Project (former Forestry and Freedom buildings) remains within the Vice Chancellor’s delegation to execute a construction contract of up to \$90M.

03-12-2021_UC_16399-10438

Council noted that the Development Application for the Forestry and Timber Yard’s Project was proposed to be submitted to the City of Hobart on 17 December 2021.”⁶

March 2022 – cost of Forestry Building project (including the Freedom Furniture Building) estimated at \$86 million.⁷

4 March 2022 – reference in Academic Senate minutes:

“The Forestry/Timber Yards Development Application was submitted to the City of Hobart on December 17 last year and is currently in the review stage by Council ahead of becoming public, inviting representations from the community. The application and supporting designs have been peer reviewed and a number of minor adjustments have been made to minimise potential grounds for appeal.

....

An engagement plan has been developed and is in the process of being implemented to support the University’s CBD move ahead of the Forestry Development Application being advertised. City of Hobart Councillors, State and Federal members of parliament, key

⁵ https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1591161/University-of-Tasmania-Council-minutes-extract-Hobart-City-Move.pdf, p21. Note: the figure “\$90M” is redacted in the publicly available document. I have an unredacted copy of this section of the minutes, provided to me privately.

⁶ https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1634244/University-Council-Minutes-2019-2022-Redacted.pdf, p248. Note: the words “of up to \$90M” are redacted in the publicly available document. I have an unredacted copy of this section of the minutes, provided to me privately.

⁷ <https://theutaspapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024-20-January-Forestry-cost-blowout-Mercury.pdf>

stakeholders and local business owners are an early focus, with a mix of earned media and advertising to follow.”⁸

18 October 2022 – extensive reference in the UTAS Council Minutes under an item called “Forestry Contract Update”. Much of this is heavily redacted. The unredacted text is:

“Resolution 18-10-2022_ UC_ 10521-11631

Council delegates its authority to the sub-committee comprising the Chancellor, Chair of the Strategic Resourcing Committee ('SRC') and Council member Sarah-Jayne Hall to approve a further increase to the delegation to the Vice-Chancellor and allow the contract to be executed if the Main Works proposal results in a contract value exceeding the Vice-Chancellor's delegation.

Resolution 18-10-2022_ UC_ 10521-11632

Council delegates its authority to the Chief Operating Officer to approve variations to the executed contract up to \$2M, and for those that do not materially alter the original contract.”⁹

13 January 2023 – In a media release, UTAS announced commencement of construction at the Forestry Building. UTAS’ media release refers to a cost of \$131 million (without reference to earlier cost estimates) and also includes the following references to completion timing:

“Construction has begun at Hobart’s iconic Forestry building, which will be restored and given new life as an inner-city hub for learning, research and collaboration **over the next two years**.

....

The City of Hobart approved the Development Application for the restoration last year. Works are expected to **take two years** to complete with staff and students to be using the building in 2025.”¹⁰ [my bolding]

20 January 2023 – Mercury published a story highlighting the cost blowout in the Forestry Building project from \$86 million to \$131 million.¹¹ The story included the following:

“When complete in 2025, the building will become home to the College of Business and Economics, the Law School and administrative offices.

⁸ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/75808/230614-UTAS-QON-Response.pdf, p41

⁹ https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1698674/University-Council-minutes-2022.pdf, pp55-56

¹⁰ <https://www.utas.edu.au/about/news-and-stories/articles/2023/a-new-life-begins-for-one-of-hobarts-most-iconic-buildings>

¹¹ <https://theutaspapers.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024-20-January-Forestry-cost-blowout-Mercury.pdf>

Executive Director Campus Transformation Phil Leersen said the cost of the Forestry building renovation had increased as the project had moved from the high-level design phase to the construction phase.

‘This is due to a number of factors including the addition of a new pedestrian bridge to improve accessibility, the complexity of the civil and ground works as well as the important heritage aspects of the project, and the increases in supply and trade costs across the construction sector. The project value incorporates fit out items such as furniture, IT and audiovisual equipment,’ Mr Leersen said.”

3 March 2023 – reference in Academic Senate minutes:

“Construction activities have commenced on the Forestry and Timberyards building, the future home of the College of Business and Economics and the School of Law. Early works will consist of demolition and stormwater and sewer work. The project is expected to **take approximately 2.5 years to complete** [ie to June 2025, assuming this statement referred to construction commencing in January 2023].”¹² [my bolding]

12 May 2023 – reference in Academic Senate minutes:

“Construction continues on the Forestry and Timberyards building, the future home of the College of Business and Economics, the School of Law and some professional staff. Demolition is well advanced, and installation of new Council sewer and stormwater lines is about to commence. Practical completion is now expected in **mid-August 2025**.”¹³ [my bolding]

22 August 2024 – UTAS presentation to PAC includes reference to Forestry Building costing \$154 million.¹⁴ The presentation also stated:

“We have a successful history of capital program delivery on time and on budget”¹⁵

2 October 2024 – in evidence to the PAC, UTAS COO Craig Barling indicated that work on the Forestry Building project would be completed in 15 months – that is, by **March 2026**.¹⁶

¹² https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/75808/230614-UTAS-QON-Response.pdf, p47

¹³ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0028/75808/230614-UTAS-QON-Response.pdf, p48

¹⁴ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/84375/Parliamentary-Inquiry_August-2024.pdf, slide 43

¹⁵ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/84375/Parliamentary-Inquiry_August-2024.pdf, slide 35

¹⁶ https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0029/85907/PAC-Wednesday-2-October-2024-FINAL.pdf, p21