



Apple blocks release of plans for Federation Square store

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Tech giant Apple has stopped the Andrews government publicly releasing plans for its controversial \$100 million "flagship" store in Federation Square.

In a week of confusion about the public handling of controversial project, the government twice promised to release concept plans to *The Age* – detailing Apple's demolition and construction plans for the store – but then reneged.



Apple has blocked the release of plans for its proposed Federation Square store. Photo: Supplied

On Friday the government confirmed Apple had blocked public release details of the scheme that triggered a storm of protest when announced by Tourism Minister John Eren days before Christmas..

Patrick Molan, spokesman for Minister for Trade and Investment Philip Dalidakis, said: "Apple is refusing the release the plans and I don't think that will be changing any time soon unfortunately."



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An artist's impression of the new Apple flagship store to be built at Federation Square in Melbourne.

The Age understands a contract between Federation Square management and Apple includes a clause giving the company veto over release of information.

Whether the government is officially bound by the contract, or another, is unclear. "We can't discuss commercial contracts and agreements," said Mr Molan when quizzed about the whether the government was formally hamstrung under the Apple deal.



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But within senior government ranks there no doubt that Apple has the whip hand at Federation Square. "Apple owns this world; we just live in it," quipped one senior Andrews government insider.



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To date, only scant public information has been made available about the proposed store, including Apple's marketing images. Apple did not respond to questions on when the concept plans for Fed Square would be publicly released and why they had not been so far.

In his surprise approval of the project, planning minister Richard Wynne – who *The Age* has revealed personally opposed the scheme – bypassed Melbourne City Council, the government's long term partner in the conception, development and funding of Federation Square.

Council officers were this week briefed about, but not given, plans. On

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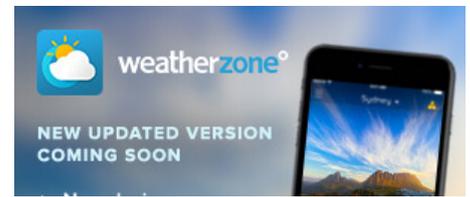
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Friday councillors were given plans, but in strict confidence.

Councillor and ALP member Jackie Watts said Apple had "duped" the Andrews government. "Apple was presented with at least one of the development opportunities around the Metro Tunnel redevelopment.



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Councillor Rohan Leppert, a Green member, said the secrecy around the Apple deal was unacceptable. "That the public was deliberately and completely cut out in this instance is extremely worrying, and the public backlash is entirely justified. The electorate won't put up with this level of secrecy," he said.

The Age can reveal Apple will pour \$100 million into the store, the surrounding public space and a 20-year lease.

Under the agreement, Federation Square's Yarra building – which houses Koorie Heritage Trust – will be demolished and rebuilt.

Apple will pay to keep part of the facade of the demolished Yarra building for possible use as spare parts for the other original structures that remain at the site.

Federation Square is one of Melbourne's top tourists attractions with more than 10 million people visiting each year, but has not made a profit since opening in 2002.

Apple – the maker of Phones, iPads and Apple TVs, which had a market value of \$US 891 billion on Friday – raked in \$7.57 billion in Australian sales last financial year.

It paid a dividend of almost \$222 million to its parent, made a profit of just \$3.67 million, and paid \$128.2 million in income tax.

Asked about the deal, former Liberal opposition leader John Hewson said governments shouldn't be doing any favours for multinationals that are not 'good corporate citizens' in Australia."

Laura Murray, Victorian President of the Planning Institute of Australia, said it was "not appropriate" that Apple was not releasing its concept plans at this point.

"In fact the whole process for the approval of the Apple store at Federation Square has not been appropriate.

"The concept plans should have been released as part of an initial public consultation process that allowed the people of Melbourne to comment on the proposed scheme for their square."

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