

## City Gate outlets must be vacated by March 27

Matthew Xuereb



Time is running out for the Valletta shop tenants who will be affected by the redevelopment of City Gate.

Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

Shops at City Gate and Freedom Square, in Valletta must be vacated by March 27, which means tenants have two weeks within which to reach an agreement with the government on alternative premises.

Reginald Fava, who, on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, is representing 12 of the 14 tenants, said that, although no deal had yet been struck, the government had been "very receptive" and understood their concerns.

Talks were still under way and Mr Fava said there was "goodwill" for a solution to be found.

A spokesman for the Parliamentary Secretariat for Land, which is dealing with the tenants, would not give any further details, given that talks were still in progress.

The government has already declared that the shopping mall above Burger King in City Gate could be used as alternative premises, but even though Mr Fava agreed it was a possibility, he described the present state of the place as a "dump".

"They mentioned refurbishing it but it's more complicated than that. We are concerned about loss of customers because of the new location. We are also worried about the refurbishment of the individual shops and the obstruction the City Gate project would cause," he admitted.

Mr Fava said he set up a committee, made of representatives of shops owners in Merchants Street and Republic Street, and incorporating the Valletta Alive Foundation, to discuss ways of mitigating the effect the Renzo Piano project would have on Valletta outlets. Parking problems were also being addressed.

The entrance to Valletta being proposed by Mr Piano will do away with the arcades and the shops on one side of Freedom Square. The outlets operating from the ruins of the old opera house will also have to close down as they do not feature in the plans.

Upon his arrival from a meeting with Mr Piano and his team in Paris last month, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi had said the project would start in April with the removal of the existing structures around Freedom Square.

Work was meant to have started in January but was delayed by three months to give time to the government to reach an agreement with the Freedom Square shop tenants.

The Piano project incorporates a roofless theatre, on which Dr Gonzi said the government would be following Mr Piano's advice.

A new Parliament will be built in Freedom Square and there will be alterations to the façade of a block of government flats on the left of the entrance to the capital city and the rehabilitation of the grubby bus terminus outside but these two projects have only just been added to the architect's brief.

So far, between €60-€80 million have been set aside for the project.

## Comments

J.Borg(4 weeks, 2 days ago) 

Its a good thing the government is doing this hopefully we will not need to smell the smell of public toilets anymore as soon as we walk in the gate.

Robert Scullion(4 weeks, 2 days ago) 

@Paul Barrett

The €60-80m is money for a Capital project. The money isn't available every year therefore to say that is should be spent on health services misses the point. If you did that, you would then need to find that same level of money again next year and the year after that or cut services.

T Camilleri(4 weeks, 2 days ago)


The money is NOT available and Gonzi is increasing our taxes to make good for his squandering and grandeur aspirations.

Paul Barrett(4 weeks, 2 days ago)

A capital project - building accommodation for the long term sick who need medical supervision and thus relieving the pressure on vital beds needed for acute cases at the hospital or building accommodation so that MP's are not crowded during its occasional use.

Most of those in need of this extra accommodation are the elderly - yes, the people that made Malta what it is today - are we just to abandon them or continue with the overcrowding, continuing to have people wait for hours or days in a corridor for a bed as the did in St Luke's.

As I said, it is a matter of priorities. My own personal view is that if I were a leader, I would put the people I am leading first and my own comfort second.

Paul Barrett(on 11/3/10) 

60 to 80 million - that would go a long way to providing support and accommodation for the rehabilitation of patients in need of care but not urgent medical treatment that are currently taking up beds in the new hospital.

Perhaps I have my priorities wrong.

C. Farrugia(4 weeks, 1 day ago)

No Mr Barrett, your priorities, and those of everyone who has a heart and good conscience, are in the right place.

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