

## Compensation for shop owners at Freedom Square

Fiona Galea Debono

Shop owners in part of Freedom Square, Valletta, will be offered compensation - either financial or in the form of alternative premises - so that by December they can vacate the properties that will be affected by the City Gate project.

The kiosks in City Gate affected by the project would also be receiving a letter in the coming days, informing them that they would have to move out by December.

It was just a matter of identifying exactly which kiosks would be involved but talks would also be held to see how best to compensate them, the Parliamentary Secretary for Revenues and Land, Jason Azzopardi said.



The Land Commissioner last week sent a letter to the shops on one side of Freedom Square and those on the opera house site that would not feature in Valletta's new-look entrance designed by architect Renzo Piano.

The letter, sent on Tuesday, "politely" informed them that they would have to leave the premises by the end of the year because works were scheduled to start in January. They were promised that individual meetings would be held as from today week to discuss forms of compensation.

The 13 affected shops in Freedom Square each had a lease that was renewable every six months, Dr Azzopardi explained.

Of the eight shops under the opera house site, one had no legal title whatsoever and had been tolerated over the years while the others had been served with a "stop rent" notice about four years ago due to the project. However, Dr Azzopardi explained, the Land Department had been accepting money from them as compensation for use.

Legally, they did not have a title of lease but they would still be invited to discuss compensation, he added. Dr Azzopardi said the lease of one outlet was due to expire in 2014 but it was being terminated on the grounds of "public purpose".

He did not think every shop would opt for alternative accommodation, saying there was not enough space to cater for each one in the area of Freedom Square that would not be affected by the project.

"The approach taken in the letters is to discuss and not to impose," Dr Azzopardi said.

He was reacting to the anger of some shop owners who claimed they had been ignored. "No consultation whatsoever has taken place and we are absolutely in the dark as to what will happen to our shops," an irritated entrepreneur had said.

Reginald Fava, owner of Chemimart pharmacy, had questioned whether the government would offer the shop owners alternative premises, compensation, or simply throw them out.

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## Comments

Raymond Sammut (1 week, 4 days ago)  
@ R Grima

So much better without a roof. With some 1200 people --full capacity-- inside, people will never feel hot, and there will be no need for whirling air-conditioners overhead. Imagine the atmosphere. No roof, yet people cannot hear anything from outside the four walls of the theatre, because the auditorium will negate everything outside. And looking at the zenith during a night performance you see the dome of the night-sky, just to add to the atmosphere. And in a mid-summer night in Malta, who would want a roof. I remember as a child, we would bring out the blankets out on the street in summer in front of the door in the alley ways where I grew up, spending whole nights chatting along, drinking wine and never wanting to go to sleep -- entire families, at just about every house. Why artists in Malta today would want to have a roof. Where is their sense of adventure, and their flair for innovation -- for something different -- and without losing our connection with the past. Go on, Signore Piano. Raise the Maltese phoenix from its ashes. Show us what you can do. Let the poetry begin.

R Grima (1 week, 4 days ago)  
Bugger the forebears Mr Sammut. Let's leave poetry to the poets and let Piano give us at least a roof on that ruin.

Raymond Sammut (1 week, 5 days ago)  
@ a.camilleri I think that Signore Piano got it right this time -- in regard to the opera theatre site. He is pulling out whatever is left from the past, and projecting it out into the coming years and decades. The main feature -- which I view as a big strength -- of his plan is "adaptability". Malta is a small community, and therefore cannot afford anything which specialises for what can be called a niche. What Piano is stating with his design is this. "Let us build a theatre that has the potential to attract a diversity of artists. To

succeed, we will ensure that this theatre will be open ended. I, Renzo Piano, shall create for the Maltese of today the basic shell; one which is virtually naked and made from the remanent of their forebears. The Maltese of tomorrow can dress this shell with what technology can provide as time moves on." The design, therefore, is shrewd and prescient, because changes -- cultural and economic -- are bound to come. Piano is imbuing this piece of architecture with the versatility that would allow it to evolve, adapt and survive rather than degenerate into a white elephant.

a.camilleri (1 week, 5 days ago)

If something decent were to be built instead of the opera house ruins, then asking the shop owners to move out would have made sense. As opposed to the plans for the parliament building and city gate which look promising, the plans for the opera house (in my modest opinion) leave a bit to be desired.....

Raymond Sammut (1 week, 5 days ago)

I think that some form of assistance is deserving on the part of these shopkeepers. Please consider the fact that we are already well into the new financial year, and the eviction notice is only being served in writing presently. Some form of assistance for relocation would be justified even if the government is exempt from liability. The real concern here is that not all shops are --apparently-- being removed from Freedom Square and the Opera site. In my view, there should be total abnegation of commercial activity in the presence of Parliament House. So far as I know, this is the required decorum in democratic countries. Furthermore, shops (and apartments) on the other side of the city entrance will also need to be likewise removed. This would create space for future new Law Courts -- which would be capially positioned next to the Legislature of the country. Such positioning, and total abnegation, would make an essential national statement in regard to Freedom, Democracy and Justice in the country. This in contrast to merely creating a "new-look entrance", which is a most inappropriate way (by The Times) to describe the Piano's plans and true purpose.

John Inguanez (1 week, 5 days ago)

I do like very much Reginald Fava. He wants compensation, when he knew that someday he will be thrown out of the premises. Mr Fava, I have one question, simple and fair, do you give compensation if a workers is found as redundant with your company? And Mr Fava aren't you the same person who when Malta was moving towards the euro changeover, said that there was no price freeze? Do you remember members of the business community saying that they will not pay any more commission on exchange of foreign currency because we have the same currency? Where all the money saved have gone? Surely not in the consumers' pockets! For once, Mr Fava let the government work on what he, and many thinks, is a very good project for the capital city.

D Delia (1 week, 5 days ago)

This is a different approach to the approach taken with the tenant at St. Annes Square in Sliema. Both had an expiring lease, the government wants the property back but in

Valletta's case discussions are to be held for an alternative premises or compensation. The government ought to have the same approach with all the tenants.

c. camilleri (1 week, 5 days ago)

Why is it that the public is expected to compensate expired lease holders? Had the landlord been a private entity no such compensation would be given. So why all this generosity with our money. After all some of the shops and kiosks have expected this to happen long ago. So why all this dilly dally? . Naturally to squeeze what they can from the Govt. The same old story.

@ Reginald Fava . As expected you are very generous when it comes to public money.

Nigel Lawrence (1 week, 5 days ago)

I was under the mistaken impression that once a contract of rent has expired there are no liabilities on the owner of the property whatsoever, either financially or in finding alternative accommodation. Certainly NOT a commitment from the taxpayer.

J Buhagiar (1 week, 5 days ago)

Is this the investment GONZIPN is always preaching about..... WOW i am amazed how he prioritize his investment..... I really need him to teach me how..... This project will really bring good investment to our country.... YES of course by putting workers jobs in danger just to have anew parliament and some steel poles protruding which will need a lot of maintenance apart from costing the country millions to build.

Joanne Micallef (1 week, 5 days ago)

Isn't the law supposed to be equal for all? because if it is, I fail to comprehend why these shop owners will be getting any compensation.

mario salnitro (1 week, 5 days ago)

AND WHO DO YOU THINK WILL SUFFER??

ONLY THE SALE PERSONS WHO WORK IN THESE SHOPS.

ALWAYS THE SAME 'IZ-ZGHIR JBATI DEJJEM' .!!!!

SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE.

R Pace Bonello (1 week, 5 days ago)

What is wrong with this country? A lease expires and the lease holder is compensated to vacate the property. What banality, what misuse of public funds? Is our government spineless? Did the Magic Kiosk get any compensation? His lease was up too. On what basis will they be compensated? Do they have any legal right? Is the government setting a precedent? It would be interesting to see what the general public has to say with the way our taxes are being squandered. Is the government afraid of losing some votes? They will lose mine if they compensate, one way or the other.

Joseph Pace (1 week, 5 days ago)

Well if this will really be a repeat of the Magic Kiosk saga, I very much welcome the change. The place really looks and feels so much better.

I hope the surroundings of this new project will get a face lift too.

Anthony Magri (1 week, 5 days ago)

Will the Piano project affect those shops under the arcade? Why was not Piano instructed that in his plans he should take into account that the existing shops are to remain in place. Instead of a square they will have a sheltered street in front of them, an arcade.

Closing those shops means a loss of a substantial revenue. It must be an error in planning

or some mistake or misunderstanding that is causing this turmoil. A repetition of the Magic Kiosk saga. Revise the plans to avoid hardships and loss of revenue.

M Borg (1 week, 5 days ago)

@Christopher Pollard

Exactly, if the lease expires end of this year, probably this is a cancellable lease therefore the government has legal right to terminate the lease and therefore no compensation is required! Why do we always have to end up like this when the gov. has to take action?

We donated money to the shipyards employees for being made redundant and now we are going to give compensation for simply not renewing a lease! Unbelievable!

Christopher Pollard (1 week, 5 days ago)

I must be missing the point here but, if the leases are due to finish at the end of the year, why are the shopkeepers expecting compensation?

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