

**10.1 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN: SOUTH MELBOURNE TOWN HALL**

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**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 This report presents for Council's noting a Conservation Management Plan for the South Melbourne Town Hall.



**2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The South Melbourne Town Hall building complex is one of the municipality's most important built assets.
- 2.2 To support our stewardship of that asset, a Conservation Management Plan has been prepared. It updates and supersedes the similar plan of 1995.
- 2.3 City of Port Phillip is readying to undertake significant repair of the Town Hall. The policies and key actions prescribed by the Conservation Management Plan will guide the near-term remediation and renewal works, to help ensure that such work enriches rather diminishes the Town Hall's heritage values.
- 2.4 They will also be incorporated into the South Melbourne Town Hall Asset Management Plan, for long term maintenance and cyclical renewal.
- 2.5 The Conservation Management Plan additionally helps City of Port Phillip consider and potential future alteration, upgrade or change in use of the South Melbourne Town Hall.
- 2.6 The Conservation Plan recognises that reactivation of the Town Hall is a priority.



### 3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes the *South Melbourne Town Hall Conservation Management Plan (2021)*, which updates and supersedes the 1995 version.
- 3.2 Notes that the *Conservation Management Plan* will help ensure that the future use, management and upgrades of the South Melbourne Town Hall enrich rather than diminish its assessed heritage values.
- 3.3 Thanks the contributors to the Conservation Management Plan.

### 4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

#### The asset

- 4.1 South Melbourne Town Hall is one of the most important heritage buildings within the City of Port Phillip.
- 4.2 Its architectural, historical and social significance is well acknowledged, including by:
  - its registration on the Victorian Heritage Register (H0217);
  - responses to the recent community survey (*Have Your Say: South Melbourne Town Hall future use*, November 2019); and
  - the *South Melbourne Town Hall Conservation Analysis & Management Plan* (1995, Helen Lardner Conservation & Design).
- 4.3 The Town Hall has had a long history of alteration and adaptation in response to changes in use and the evolving functional requirements of its users.
- 4.4 An interactive video tour of the building, in its current form, can be undertaken via this link: [https://virtual.macuport.com/city\\_of\\_port\\_phillip/CYPP.03.20.04/201223/index.htm](https://virtual.macuport.com/city_of_port_phillip/CYPP.03.20.04/201223/index.htm)

#### The Conservation Management Plan

- 4.5 The Conservation Management Plan is the principal guiding document for the conservation and management of the Town Hall – from routine maintenance to large scale change.
- 4.6 It identifies: the heritage values/significance of the Town Hall; conservation policies to protect that significance; and a conservation action plan.
- 4.7 It helps City of Port Phillip as owner and asset manager, and approval authorities, make sound decisions about that heritage place.
- 4.8 The Conservation Management Plan defines the kinds of changes that can be made without compromising the heritage significance of the place.
- 4.9 It supports good heritage management, and is an integral part of a total asset management approach.

#### The 1995 Management Plan

- 4.10 The care and management of the significant heritage features of the South Melbourne Town Hall has been guided by the (already mentioned) *South Melbourne Town Hall Conservation Analysis & Management Plan* prepared in 1995 by Helen Lardner Conservation & Design.



- 4.11 That plan is now twenty five years old.
- 4.12 There are also gaps in its information. For instance, it does not consider the internal roof area, much of which was not readily accessible at the time of preparing the 1995 report.

#### **The new Management Plan**

- 4.13 Conservation Management Plans need to be revisited periodically.
- 4.14 Accordingly, the City has commissioned a new Conservation Management Plan.
- 4.15 It has been prepared Lovell Chen Architecture & Heritage, with significant initial contribution by Helen Lardner Conservation & Design.
- 4.16 Lovell Chen has been established for several decades. It is a recognised leader in the field of heritage and conservation practice. Its prior work includes conservation management plans for Government House in Canberra, the Victorian Trades Hall and St Kilda Library.
- 4.17 The Principal of Helen Lardner Conservation & Design is Helen Lardner, a registered architect, with a Master of Architecture in Conservation and twenty five years' experience. Helen is an expert advisor to the World Heritage Committee, the Australian President of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, a former Member of the Heritage Council of Victoria (including its Chair of Registrations for five years), and has advised many municipal councils and major property developers.

#### **Findings**

- 4.18 The Conservation Management Plan confirms that the Town Hall building complex is of State significance.
- 4.19 It notes that:
- changes in use of the facility over time has resulted in some significant physical alterations, with relatively very few rooms within the complex retaining their original form;
  - continued use of the building complex, at least in part, for civic purposes, would be consistent with the main building's social and historic values, and not incompatible with commercial reactivation of the place;
  - although the building complex would benefit from a holistic and considered renewal approach, there is no imperative for a consistent design approach – given that its origin is multiple uses within one complex, and the generally localised rather than holistic pattern of historical management of the site; and
  - the “set piece” spaces and elements of primary or contributory significance – including the exterior building fabric (except areas modified in recent decades), the Main Hall, Council Chamber, former Library Reading Room, and the Mayor and Mayoress' suites, require a highly considered approach to management.
- 4.20 It further considers that reactivation of the building complex to be a priority, though one that will require costly and unavoidably invasive interventions to achieve compliance for disability access, building/construction regulations, and seismic compliance.



## 5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Officers met with Heritage Victoria to advise that the Conservation Management Plan was being updated. Approval was sought and received from Heritage Victoria to create access that allowed inspections of parts of the building not readily accessible.
- 5.2 The Conservation Management Plan includes input/feedback from Council's Heritage Officer, Council's Team Leader Arts & Heritage, Council's Collections Registrar, and City of Port Phillip's Cultural Heritage Reference Committee, including committee member Adair Bunnett OAM.

## 6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Allowing the Town Hall to fall into disrepair, or failing to maintain it to the extent that its conservation is threatened, breaches the *Heritage Act (Vic)1997*.
- 6.2 In addition to breaching statutory obligations, the consequences of ineffective heritage asset management include: reduced asset life; loss of civic esteem; community dissatisfaction; delays to project delivery; unscheduled or unexpected major expenditure; and functional inefficiencies due to the asset being used ineffectively/inappropriately.
- 6.3 Most works at the Town Hall require a Heritage Permit (or Heritage Permit exemption). An application for such a permit would ordinarily need to show how it reconciles with the Conservation Management Plan.

## 7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 Council is responsible for allocating public money to the management of the municipal property portfolio. The Conservation Management Plan will help City of Port Phillip appropriately care for this important building and ensure that financial investment made in it will enhance its heritage value.
- 7.2 The Conservation Management Plan helps prioritise expenditure and reduces delays when undertaking changes to the building by ensuring that heritage considerations are addressed up front.
- 7.3 Grants programmes to fund heritage works typically require a Conservation Management Plan.
- 7.4 The Conservation Management Plan has cost approximately \$45,000 to prepare, plus Officer time.

## 8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 8.1 The Conservation Management Plan supports City of Port Phillip to improve the environmental performance of the Town Hall without adversely impacting its heritage significance.

## 9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 Heritage buildings create a sense of place, adding local character and identity.
- 9.2 The Conservation Management Plan supports City of Port Phillip in its custodianship and management of the heritage asset on behalf of the community.

## 10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

- 10.1 Effective heritage asset management aligns with *Council Plan* strategic directions "Liveable Port Phillip" and "Well Governed Port Phillip".



**11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY**

**11.1 TIMELINE**

11.1.1 With this report the South Melbourne Town Hall Conservation Management Plan is formalised.

**11.2 COMMUNICATION**

11.2.1 City of Port Phillip is committed to prudently managing its heritage assets.

11.2.2 The new Conservation Management Plan helps clarify and embrace the inherent heritage qualities and values of the South Melbourne Town Hall.

11.2.3 It provides guidance on how the heritage significance should be respected in any future use, management, alteration or repair of the that building complex.

**12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST**

12.1 No officers involved in the preparation of this report have any material or general interest in the matter.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- 1. South Melbourne Town Hall Conservation Management Plan 2021**