

MELBOURNE TOWN HALL

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

130 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000

December 2024

Prepared for



Prepared by

LOVELL CHEN



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This report was prepared on, and the Melbourne Town Hall is located on, the lands of the Wurundjeri people who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years. We acknowledge their stories, connection to land, water and culture which is embedded in Country. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and acknowledge that this report includes a post-contact history that forms only a small part of the ongoing story.

Quality Assurance Register

The following register documents the development and issue of this report prepared by Lovell Chen Pty Ltd in accordance with our certified quality management system.



Project no.	Issue no.	Description	Issue date	Approval
20240514	1	Draft Heritage Impact Statement	12/12/2024	KW

Referencing

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Cover image: The stage at the Main Hall of the Melbourne Town Hall

Source: Lovell Chen

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) has been prepared for City of Melbourne to accompany a permit application to Heritage Victoria for the installation of two suspended LED screens from the ceiling within the Main Hall of the Melbourne Town Hall building, 90-130 Swanston Street, Melbourne.

The Melbourne Town Hall, located at the corner of Swanston and Collins Streets, Melbourne, is on the land of the Wurundjeri People, who are acknowledged as the Traditional Custodians of Country at and near the subject site.

1.1 Pre-application meeting

A pre-application meeting with Heritage Victoria was conducted on 17 September 2024, followed by written advice issued on 26 September 2024. The pre-application advice indicated that a permit application would be required, and that an understanding of the options analysis which demonstrates why alternative and temporary options are not considered to be suitable be included in the application. In addition, it was requested that information regarding how other similar heritage places have approached such works and an exploration as to what options exist for mitigation of the visual impact of the screens.

1.2 Application documentation and references

1.2.1 *Documentation submitted with application*

In addition to the descriptions and visual material included in this HIS, the proposed works are documented in the following:

- SK-01A, SK02A, SK-03A and SK04A (inclusive) prepared by Melbourne City Council, dated 18 July 2024
- Melbourne Town Hall – AV Upgrade Works Methodology prepared by Lovell Chen dated 25 November 2024
- Melbourne Town Hall – Installation of LED Screens Reasonable or Economic Use prepared by City of Melbourne
- Calculation spreadsheet - LED screens in Melbourne Town Hall – Permanent vs By Event Installation

1.2.2 *References*

The *Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan*, prepared by Lovell Chen Pty Ltd, February 2022, is referred to in this HIS as the 'CMP' and relevant sections have been reproduced.

2.0 STATUTORY HERITAGE CONTROLS

2.1 Victorian Heritage Register (VHR)

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building, located at 90-130 Swanston Street, Melbourne, is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) as place number H0001. The mapped extent of registration is shown in Figure 1 and is described as follows:

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 1 encompassing Lot 1 and Lot 2 on Plan of Subdivision 713409P, and Allotment 20A Section 11 City of Melbourne, Parish of Melbourne North, and part of the Swanston Street and Collins Street road reserves extending from the building facade to the kerb and including the town hall portico, and including the registered objects integral to the place listed in the inventory held by the Executive Director being: Lord Mayor's Chair, Town Clerk's Chair, Original Council Chairs, Couch (bench), Desks, Council Chamber table and the Schantz organ.¹

The statement of significance for the place is reproduced below:

What is significant?

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building, a five-storey town hall, designed by Reed and Barnes and constructed in 1867 in the French Renaissance style, with various additions dating from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. It includes a two-storey portico over the main entrance (1887), an adjoining four-storey administration building (1908-10), a two-storey extension to the Collins Street elevation (1925) and objects integral.

How is it significant?

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is of historical, architectural, aesthetic and social significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the VHR:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion D

Importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural places and objects

Criterion E

Importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

Criterion F

Importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

Criterion G

Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Why is it significant?

¹ Victorian Heritage Database, Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building. <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/813#statement-significance>, accessed 4 November 2024.

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is historically significant as the civic centre of Melbourne since 1867 and as the site of several important meetings in the progress of the Federation movement in Victoria. [Criterion A]

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is architecturally significant as a distinguished work by the prominent Melbourne architects Reed and Barnes, who designed a number of important Melbourne buildings. It is also significant as a prototype for numerous suburban town halls that were built in the late 1870s and 1880s. [Criterion D]

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is aesthetically significant for its array of nineteenth and early twentieth century interiors including murals in the main hall by Napier Waller and objects integral to the council chamber. [Criterion E]

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is technically significant for the Town Hall Grand Organ, a massive and substantially intact pipe organ. Installed in the Melbourne Town Hall in 1929, its complex system of casing, grilles, pipework, and consoles are architecturally integral to the main performance hall. [Criterion F]

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is socially significant and is valued for a range of cultural and experiential reasons. Since the 1880s, it has been the venue for major civic and entertainment events which are patronised by communities across Victoria. [Criterion G]²

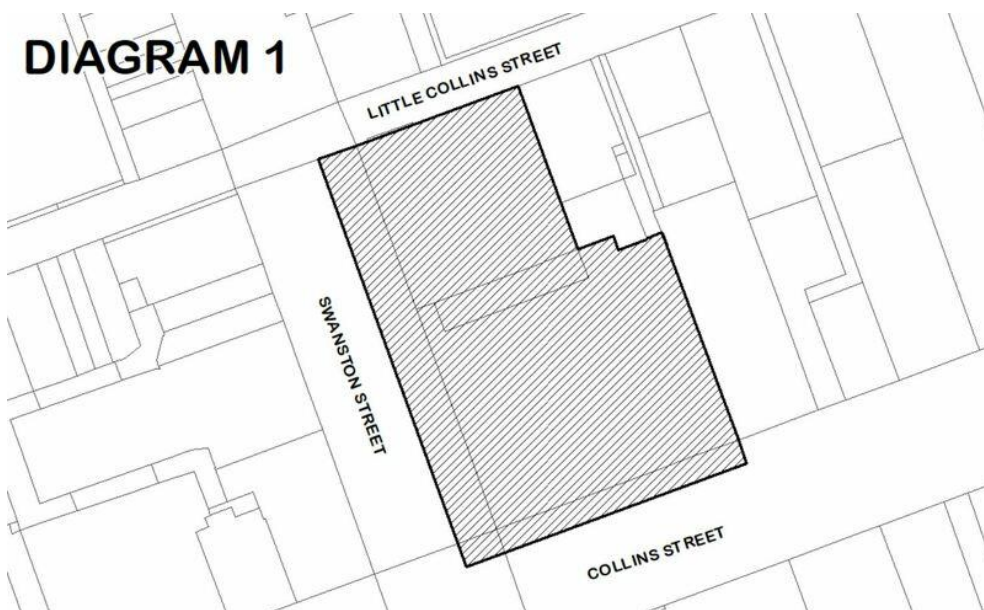


Figure 1 Extent of registration diagram
Source: Victorian Heritage Database, accessed 4 November 2024

² Victorian Heritage Database, Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building
<https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/813#statement-significance>, accessed 4 November 2024.

2.2 Heritage Overlay (HO)

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building is identified as HO746 in the Schedule to the Heritage Overlay (HO) of the Melbourne Planning Scheme. The mapped extent of HO746 is shown in Figure 2, which is consistent with the VHR extent of registration mapping. In addition, the site forms part of the Collins East Precinct which is identified as HO504 in the Schedule (Figure 3).

In accordance with Clause 43.01-3 of the Melbourne Planning Scheme, no permit is required under the Heritage Overlay to develop a heritage place which is included in the Victorian Heritage Register, other than an application to subdivide a heritage place of which all or part is included in the Victorian Heritage Register.



Figure 2 Extent of HO746 with the location of the Town Hall indicated
Source: VicPlan

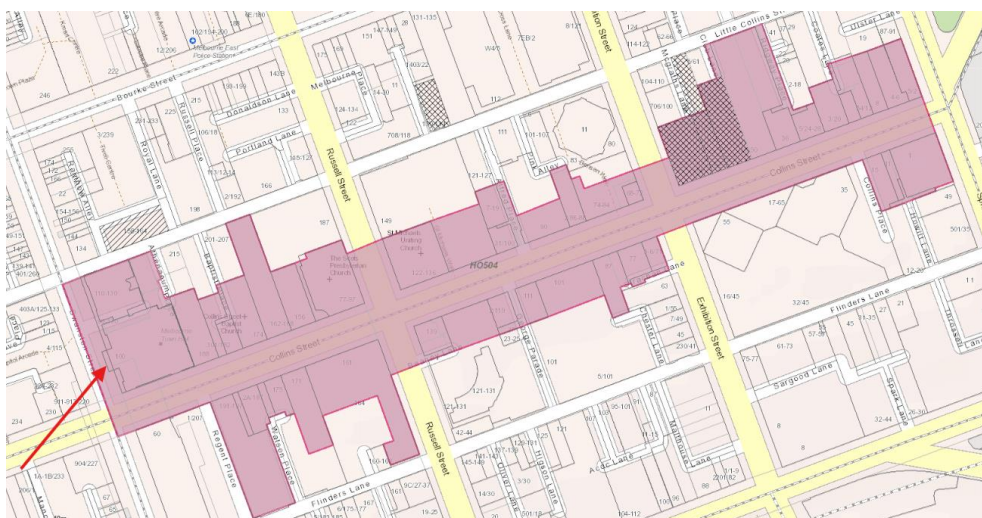


Figure 3 Extent of HO504 with the location of the Town Hall indicated
Source: VicPlan

3.0 OVERVIEW HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION

3.1 History

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration buildings occupy the whole lot bounded by Swanston (west), Collins (south) and Little Collins (north) streets and the Victoria Hotel and Athenaeum Theatre to the east.

The Melbourne Town Hall was constructed in 1867-1873 to a design prepared by Reed and Barnes that incorporates a variety of stylistic references including English, Baroque and Italian Renaissance, within a stylistic framework of the French Second Empire. The principal façade addresses Swanston Street, with a two-storey portico over the main entrance (added in 1888) and a prominent clock tower positioned at the south-west corner where Collins and Swanston Streets intersect.³ An Administration Building was constructed on the adjoining block in 1908-1910.

A fire broke out in the Main Hall of the Melbourne Town Hall in February 1925, which destroyed the interior of the hall, the portraits of past Mayors and the organ. The reconstruction of the Main Hall was undertaken in 1925-6. These works included the construction of an additional bay to the east of the earlier building, to accommodate a larger Main Hall. The interior spaces of the Main Hall date from the 1920s works and are substantially intact to their original form and design. The hall incorporates a large open floor area, with a tiered stage to the northern end (altered in 1961). A U-shaped balcony extends around the east, west and south walls at second floor level, which incorporates tiered seating. An organ, installed in 1929, is located on the stage (refurbished 1997-2001) and the Napier Waller murals to the east and west walls of the balcony, and flanking the stage, are of particular significance.

A description of the key elements of the internal space is provided in the datasheet for the Main Hall which is included in the CMP. This description is reproduced below:

Ceiling

Coffered plaster ceiling with large flower detail to the centre of each bay, with the exception of four bays which are bronze framed glazed skylights. The skylights originally provided natural light to the space but have since been covered over within the roof space. The ceiling ribs are decorated with a modified Greek Key pattern motif. Eight ceiling hung electroliers with bronze frames and three smaller fittings suspended over the balcony seating to rear (south).

Balcony

The balcony soffit is decorated with banding of rosettes and with recessed lighting in elongated octagon and square forms. The recess to the lights is decorated with plaster mouldings. The balcony balustrade is decorated with a swag motif to its outer face.

Floor

Secret nailed 60mm tongue and groove board, with openable section in the centre for access to the basement. The balcony is carpeted, with floor mounted brass handrails to the gallery and to staircases in the south corners.

³ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p.74.

Walls

Walls divided into bays by painted pilasters, plain below balcony level and fluted above, with a moulded timber skirting. Mural panels designed by M Napier Waller (1893-1974) and painted directly onto 'Cellotex' tiles, are set between pilasters at upper floor level to both the east and west walls, and the flanking south walls to the south balcony seating tier. There are bronze light brackets, each fitted with two milk glass orb shades – five to both the east and west walls - set off the fluted pilasters at balcony level. Curtain to stage.

Doors

North: Pair of polished timber with three raised timber panels, set within moulded timber architrave.

South: As for the north, with polished moulded timber architrave of a different profile to the north doors. The reveals retain early gold painted lettering indicating the exit.

West: There are three timber three-leafed doors to the Crush Lobby (TH1.13) and a pair of timber framed and glazed doors to TH1.1 (corridor).

Balcony north and south: Paired polished timber three panelled doors, with raised timber panels, set within polished timber architrave, same as the first floor. Those to the south stairs retain original gold-painted directional indicators, painted directly onto the architrave and are set within deep, polished timber panelled reveals.

Fittings and furniture

Organ console and casing: polished Blackwood panelling to organ console, clock and five bays of pipes, flanked by decorative metal organ screens to either side of the console.

Modern seating to the balconies⁴

⁴ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, Appendix A: p.35.

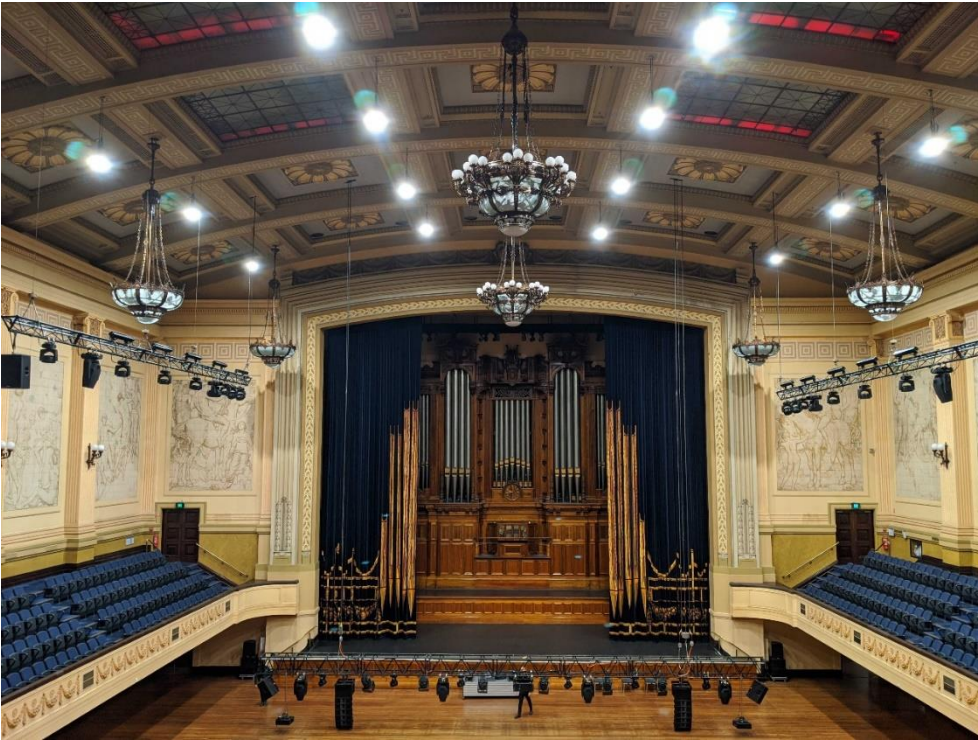


Figure 4 View of the stage and organ taken from the rear of the southern balcony (2022)

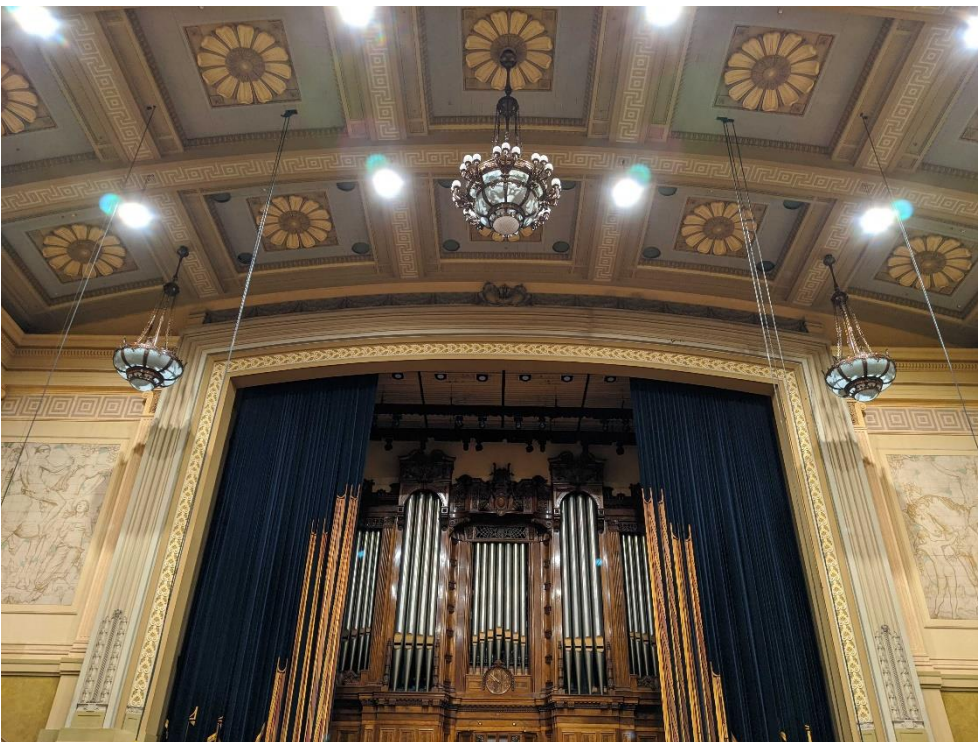


Figure 5 View of the stage and organ taken from the main floor level (2022)

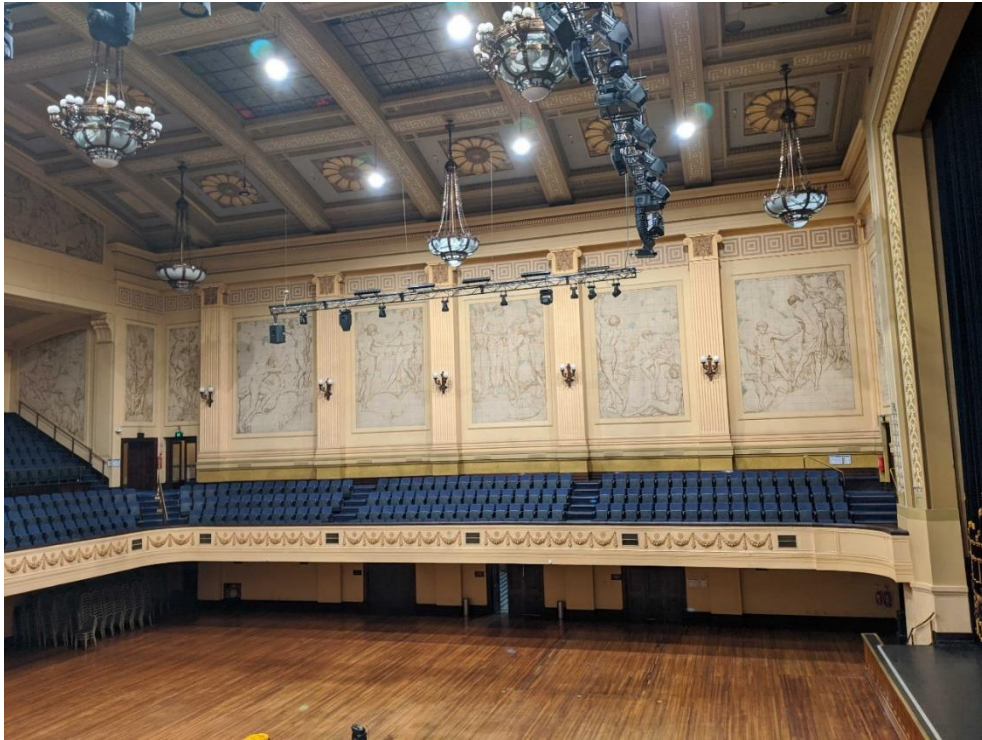


Figure 6 West wall of the Main Hall, showing the arrangement of the balcony with the Napier Waller murals above (2022)

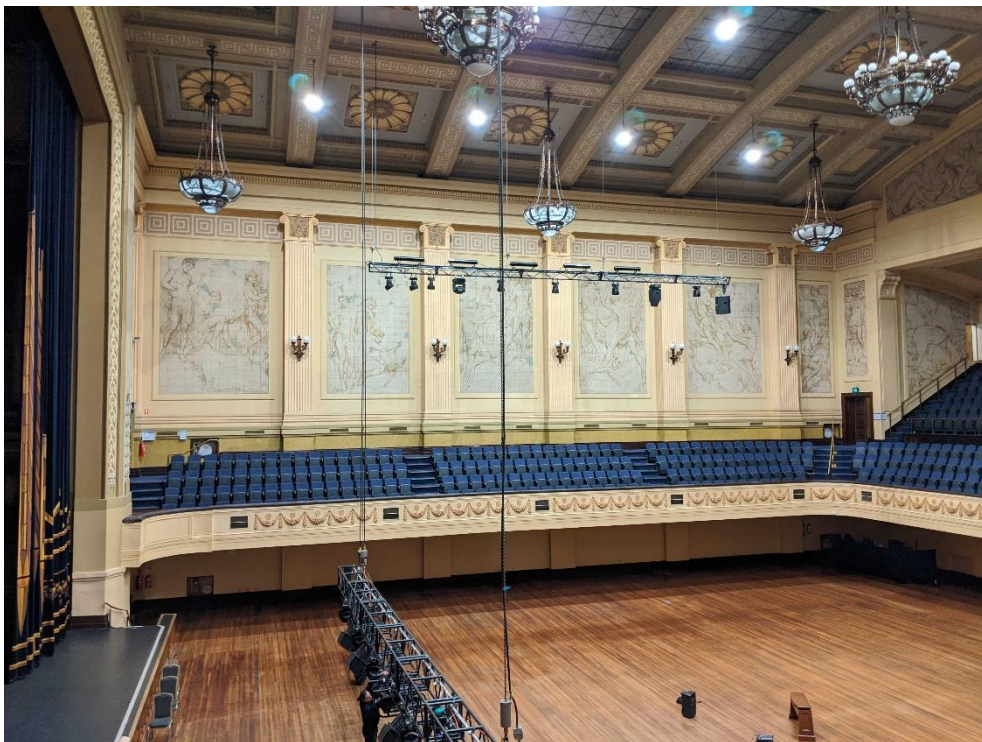


Figure 7 East wall of the Main Hall, showing the arrangement of the balcony with the Napier Waller murals above (2022)

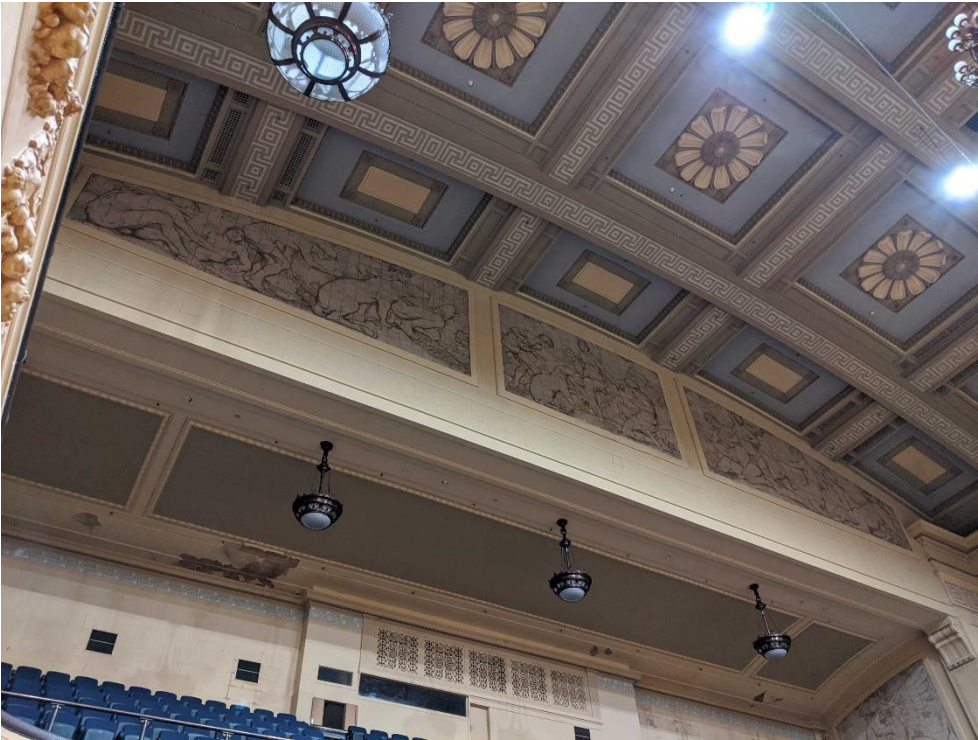


Figure 8 View of the rear (south) wall and ceiling treatment above the balcony seating prior to repair works (2022)

4.0 PROPOSED WORKS

The proposal involves the installation of two ceiling suspended LED screens within the main hall of Melbourne Town Hall. The new screens will be suspended from the ceiling to each side of the proscenium (Figure 9). Each screen will be 4m wide and 3m high. When the screens are not in use, the screen will be positioned in an upper position in front of the cornices on the sides of the stage and when they are in use, they will be lowered to just above the balcony level so that they would be visible from both the flat floor area and tiered balcony seating (Figure 9).

The screens will be suspended from cabling that will be fixed into the roof trusses above the main hall; the new hoist mechanism would also be installed within the roof cavity. The penetration to the ceiling to enable the installation of the suspension cables will involve the removal of the original Celotex tiles in specific locations. The removed tiles will be securely stored in the building for future use/reinstatement if required. A methodology for the physical works associated with the installation has been prepared by Lovell Chen (25 November 2024).

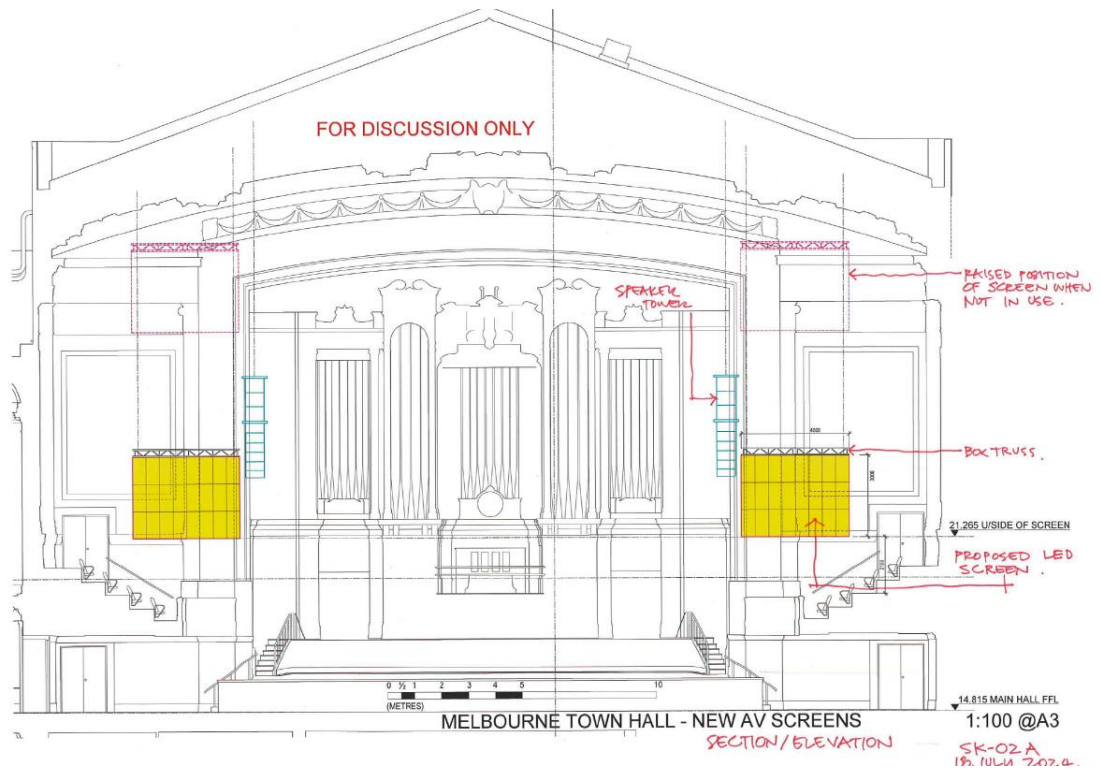


Figure 9 The proposed locations of the LED screens in the Main Hall showing the positioning when in use (highlighted in yellow), and not in use (indicated by the red line above)
 Source: Melbourne City Council, 18 July 2024

5.0 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Main Hall within the Melbourne Town Hall is identified as a space of primary significance, while the organ and Napier Waller murals are also of primary significance in their own right. The following definition of primary significance is included in the CMP:

Spaces and elements of primary significance are essential to understanding the identified values and cultural heritage significance of the Melbourne Town Hall buildings. These spaces contribute in a fundamental way to an understanding of the history, operation and function of the Town Hall as an evolved complex.⁵

The datasheet for the Main Hall includes a specific policy/tolerance for change, which is reproduced below:

There is limited opportunity within the main hall to undertake substantial alterations, however there are a number of operational issues where minor alterations to address these could be considered. Additionally, the ongoing public use of the hall is critical to the significance of the space and works which support this use could be contemplated.

The Feasibility Study identified a number of constraints to the modern operation of the main hall, particularly as associated with furniture storage, event installation and removal (bump in/bump out arrangements) and seating. Currently all functions

⁵ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p.22.

require the manual installation of chairs and/or tables and their subsequent removal and storage. Event bump in and bump out occurs via the Collins Street foyer and performance seating is stored in foyers and ancillary spaces around the hall. These arrangements are inefficient and often damaging to the historic fabric. Solutions to this are needed and may require the adaptation of secondary support spaces around the hall. Where such spaces are impacted to allow for the ongoing public use, acceptance of change will be necessary.

There are also issues associated with the internal climate control and equitable access. Any changes to address these issues should be based on a thorough investigation and the results used to inform an understanding on the impact on the fabric of the hall. In the event that intervention is required, all new works should be undertaken in a manner which is sympathetic to the design of the hall space and its materiality, scale and decorative treatments.⁶

In addition, the management and user aspirations identified in the CMP include the following specific aspirations in relation to the building and Main Hall:

- For the buildings to be financially sustainable to run, but also to generate income. This would require improved infrastructure, functions and facilities to optimise revenue and provide better value. The buildings should also be accessible and affordable for community use, such as school events.
- For the main hall to be a prestigious and successful venue in the central city, as supported by modern facilities.⁷

As related to operational constraints, the CMP identifies the following as key issues:

Modern facilities

A key issue facing both buildings is the provision of modern facilities/amenities which support both modern working methods and commercial hire expectations.

Performance and staging

There are major constraints in staging events as related to 'bump in bump out' arrangements and the damage that the building sustains in the process.⁸

The CMP includes a suite of General policies, the relevant sections of which are reproduced below:

4.3.1 Significance

Policy: Cultural heritage significance should form the basis for future planning and works.

Retention and conservation of the attributes, associations and physical fabric identified as significant in this CMP should be a key objective in the management of the place and planning future works.

⁶ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, Appendix A: p. 34.

⁷ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p. 47.

⁸ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p. 48.

Specific conservation objectives include:

- The retention and conservation of significant areas, elements, spaces and fabric in accordance with the policies and recommendations of this CMP
- A sensitive and respectful approach to adaptation, new works, future development where significant areas spaces or fabric may be affected

If alterations or changes are proposed which support an appropriate and viable use for a space, element or area of the place, works should be undertaken in a manner which has minimal impact on fabric and the form and presentation of the space, element or area where these are identified as significant.⁹

4.4.1 Levels of significance

Policy: Retain and conserve fabric and spaces of primary significance.

Wherever possible, change (either through alteration or adaptation) should avoid permanent intervention into areas and elements of primary significance and all changes in these areas should be reversible, i.e., not requiring significant reconstruction of the heritage fabric when the interventions are no longer required. Change should be carefully planned, and not undertaken on an ad hoc basis, responding to short-term requirements.

In spaces of primary significance alteration and adaptive reuse works should avoid adverse effects on related external fabric, and not be visible in principal external views of the buildings. Interventions should not impact on significant decorative schemes (internal and external) and spatial qualities where these are identified. It is noted that there are several key spaces of primary significance, such as the main hall and council chamber, where change to the valued fabric and spatial qualities would adversely affect the significance of the place as a whole.

Where significant elements are removed, any work should be undertaken in a manner which is reversible when the present need becomes obsolete. Removed items should be recorded, and carefully and securely stored for future reinstatement.¹⁰

4.4.2 Use of the place and management of change

Policy: Change or modification of the use of the Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building should be responsive to the heritage significance of the place as a whole and be consistent with the civic use of the place.

Since 1853 the site has accommodated Melbourne's Town Hall and activities associated with the operation of the council and governance of the city. The Town Hall and Administration Building continue to accommodate a combination of administrative and civic (ceremonial and public) functions. The historical and ongoing use of the Melbourne Town Hall buildings as the civic focus of the City of Melbourne, assists in maintaining the historical significance and associations of the place.

⁹ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p. 54.

¹⁰ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p. 58.

With consideration to the challenges arising from the continued civic use of the building, particularly the growth in demand for administrative space and the provision of equitable access to key civic spaces, there may be a requirement to remove at least some of these activities from the buildings. Change would likely affect key council functions such as council meetings and the provision of councillors' offices within the building. Relocating council operations from the Melbourne Town Hall buildings would have an adverse impact on the cultural heritage significance of the place, though the extent of the impact would be balanced by the nature of uses introduced in their place. In the event of such a change, the continued civic function of and public accessibility to the Melbourne Town Hall buildings, should in preference, be prioritised and maintained.

While the Heritage Act does not control the use of a heritage place, it is considered that there may be more flexibility or acceptance of change or alteration if such actions are critical to continuing the historic civic use of the place. There is some scope to introduce other uses that are compatible with the civic use of the buildings.

The continued commercial use of the Town Hall is appropriate as it provides organised access to the public spaces within the complex. Further, the commercial usage provides an income stream for the council, which supports the ongoing maintenance and conservation of the place.¹¹

4.5.2 Interiors

Policy: Retain and conserve the form, fabric and character of the significant internal elements and spaces of the Melbourne Town Hall buildings.

Policy: Where internal works are proposed, these should not impact on the external expression and presentation of the Melbourne Town Hall buildings.

Policy: Retain original or early decorative schemes and finishes to the interiors of the Melbourne Town Hall buildings.¹²

6.0 ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE IMPACTS

Section 101(2)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017* requires the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria, when determining a permit application, to consider:

the extent to which the application, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of the registered place or registered object.

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Buildings are assessed as being of historical, architectural, aesthetic and social significance. With particular reference to the Main Hall, which is located within the Melbourne Town Hall building, aesthetic significance is identified as relating to the interior decorative schemes dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the murals by Napier Waller in the main hall, and social significance is identified for the place as it is valued for a variety of cultural and experiential reasons and as the venue for major civic and entertainment events.

¹¹ Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p. 59.

¹² Melbourne Town Hall & Administration Building: Conservation Management Plan, Lovell Chen, February 2022, p. 63.

The public and civic use of the Main Hall contributes to the social significance of the heritage place. The introduction of the LED screens seeks to support the ongoing use of the space with technology that meets contemporary requirements. The works are a sensitive contemporary introduction into the space, which has been carefully considered in relation to the intent of the conservation policies included in the CMP. It is broadly anticipated in the conservation policies that change can occur to support the community and civic function of the building, and where the works encourage and enable the continued use of a space for its historically intended purpose.

With specific regard to the CMP policy for the Main Hall, which outlines the tolerance for change, it is acknowledged that while there is limited ability to undertake 'substantial alterations' within the space, 'the ongoing public use of the hall is critical to the significance of the space'. Accordingly, it is stated that works which support the public use of the space can be contemplated. The introduction of LED screens is not considered to be a substantial alteration to the space, particularly as the screens support the ongoing public use of the Main Hall as a prestigious venue for events, entertainment and community functions.

The proposed works will have limited physical impact within the Main Hall. The suspension of the LED screens ensures that the decorative scheme in its entirety will be retained and that there will be no impact on the significant Waller murals flanking the proscenium.

The physical works will involve the fixing of cabling and hoists within the roof cavity and the removal of select ceiling tiles. The identified locations for the removal of tiles will avoid any decorative treatments to the ceiling, which will all remain intact. The ability to remove the existing tiles also ensures that no new penetrations will be required into the ceiling fabric. The removed tiles will be retained and stored securely on site, with other existing tiles, which will enable their reinstatement in future if required. The cabling and hoist mechanism will be fitted within the existing roof cavity and will be concealed in views from within the Main Hall. The fixing of these elements will impact on original structural fabric, however this is fabric which is not visible and does not contribute to the valued decorative scheme and aesthetic significance of the Main Hall. In considering the physical impact to the ceiling of the Main Hall, the works are reversible and the overall impact on the decorative scheme and presentation of the ceiling is negligible due to the select nature of removing individual ceiling tiles.

When in use the screens will be lowered to balcony level, and when not in use screens will be elevated to sit in front of the cornice. During use the screens would obstruct views to the bottom corner of the Waller murals to each side of the proscenium, however the location of temporary screens would result in a similar obstruction. This type of temporary obstruction is part of the functionality of the space as an event and entertainment venue. There is no permanent impact to the Waller murals associated with the use of the screens, and it is considered that the operability of the screens is a positive outcome which ensures that the presentation of the Waller murals is appropriately maintained when the screens are not in use.

When in a raised position the screens will conceal views to the cornice and the decorative treatment above the Waller murals. There will be no concealment of a unique or specific element of the decorative scheme which is of particular significance, rather the cornice forms part of a continuous and repetitive element which as a whole contributes to the significance of the space. Again, there will be no permanent impact on the decorative scheme as the operability of the screens will ensure that each element of the decorative scheme will continue to be visible, depending on the event or use of the Main Hall at the time. Further, due to the substantial size of the space, the overall presentation and appreciation of the decorative scheme to the Main Hall will be maintained together with its aesthetic

significance. The Waller murals, arrangement of the balcony and the associated decorative scheme to the east, west and south walls will not be impacted by the proposed works.

In considering the significance of the heritage place, while the LED screens will be a visible addition to the Main Hall, the historical, architectural, aesthetic and social significance would not be adversely affected. The ongoing use of the Main Hall is also considered to be critical to the significance of the place, and the LED screens will support the desirability of the Main Hall as a destination for events, functions and entertainment.

6.1 Options analysis and comparisons

In developing the scheme for the proposed LED screens a series of alternative options was considered, however all of the options were determined not to be suitable from a heritage or operational perspective.

The Melbourne Town Hall has been installing temporary AV screens in the last few years to meet the industry expectation. However, the additional labour cost has put Melbourne Town Hall into a less competitive position and the associated 'bump in bump out' process places the existing heritage fabric and decorative schemes within the Main Hall at risk (while the installation is always done with care). While this process could continue, a permanent installation of LED screens would allow a greater number of uses to hire the space for events, including community groups who can access the hall at a discounted rate. The permanent solution also ensures that the existing decorative scheme and, in particular the adjacent Waller murals, will be retained without risk of future damage.

Consideration was also given to a permanent installation which would be fixed to the floor of the balcony to each side of the stage. Due to the nature of the display, the LED screens have to be elevated. There would be a greater physical impact associated with this option as the fixing of the screen would be into the floor of the balcony, but the permanent impact, which would arise from the placement of the screens in front of the Waller murals, is not acceptable from a heritage perspective.

A retractable screen is already provided above the stage, however this screen only allows for projections and does not enable integrated AV displays (Figure 10). The LED screens also provide a greater flexibility and clearer display. The retractable screen also impacts on the presentation and use of the stage during events, and the proposed location of the LED screens to each side of the stage enables the stage to be used to its full extent without visual interruption during an event. From a functional perspective, an upgrade to this existing screen and the AV technology available within the Main Hall is required and expected by contemporary users of the space.

In researching how other venues provide AV technology to support their event, function and entertainment venues, it is evident that permanent installation (rather than temporary installation on an event by event basis) is required to support the use of the venues. Many contemporary event venues are able to provide AV technology as part of the hiring fee, which makes these venues more desirable than the Main Hall.

The pre-application advice requested a comparison with other heritage listed venues. It is considered that the Main Hall of Melbourne Town Hall does not compare with other municipal town halls due to its size, broader community use and the variety of events and entertainment which are hosted at the venue. It is also unknown as to whether the demand on other similar venues is such that further AV technology is required or expected for the ongoing use of those places. The assessment above has appropriately provided an analysis of the significance of the Main Hall and the associated impacts which

would arise from the proposed works in the context of the heritage place, being the Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building (H0001).



Figure 10 Example of a centred AV screen at the Melbourne Town Hall covering majority of the organ at the rear of the stage
Source: Audio Visual Dynamics, Melbourne Town Hall,
<https://www.avdynamics.com.au/project/melbourne-town-hall/>, accessed on 4 December 2024

7.0 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The following considerations are also considered to be relevant to the determination of the permit application.

7.1 Reasonable or economic use

Section 101(2)(b) of the *Heritage Act 2017* requires the Executive Director, when determining a permit application, to consider:

the extent to which the application, if refused, would affect the reasonable or economic use of the registered place or registered object.

The Melbourne Town Hall and Administration Building incorporate a variety of civic and event-based uses, with the Main Hall historically providing a space for publicly accessible events, functions and entertainment. In the last few years, the Melbourne Town Hall has been installing temporary AV screens to suit industry needs but the cost of installing and removing a temporary screen substantially increases the costs of hiring the venue. Due to the costs that arise, the Melbourne Town Hall will become less competitive when compared to other event venues in Melbourne which can provide AV technology that meets contemporary requirements. In order, to support the on-going future use and desirability of the Main Hall as an event venue, the installation of the LED screens is critical to meet contemporary industry and user expectations.

The proposed installation of LED screens to each side of the stage seeks to upgrade the technology available within the Main Hall to support the ongoing use of the space as a venue for major civic and entertainment events. The intent of the works is to rectify the operational constraints identified in the CMP and to limit the requirement for ongoing and temporary 'bump in and bump out' of audio-visual presentation infrastructure to support the events which occur within the Main Hall. The temporary installation of large screens is cost prohibitive, particularly for community groups, and this also has the potential to impact on the desirability of the Main Hall as an event space within the CBD.

The appended documentation prepared by the City of Melbourne provides a detailed consideration of the reasonable use of the Main Hall and the economic impacts which would arise if the application were refused.

7.2 Statutory duties

Section 101(2)(d) of the *Heritage Act 2017* requires the Executive Director, when determining a permit application, to consider:

if the applicant is a public authority, the extent to which the application, if refused, would unreasonably detrimentally affect the ability of the public authority to perform a statutory duty specified in the application

Under section 8(2) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, the City of Melbourne has an obligation to provide good governance if it performs its role in accordance with Section 9. The Act outlines the overarching governance principles of Council as giving priority to achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations (S9(2)(b)); pursue innovative and continuous improvement (S9(2)(e)) and ensure ongoing financial viability of the Council (S9(2)(g)).

The operation of the Melbourne Town Hall as an event venue has become an integral financial contributor to the revenue of the City of Melbourne. The City of Melbourne also has a duty to provide facilities for community groups. What sets the Main Hall apart from other commercial events spaces is the City of Melbourne's ability to provide access to the space for community groups and community events at a discounted hiring cost. The LED screens and AV technology would be available to these community groups and at the associated events, which in a commercial setting would likely be cost prohibitive for these groups. Accordingly, the desirability of the Main Hall as a venue within the CBD that caters for a broad range of events, functions and entertainment, with technology available to support the use, is critical to meet the market needs at a reasonable cost.

7.3 Heritage significance of adjacent places

Section 101(3)(a) of the *Heritage Act 2017* requires the Executive Director, when determining a permit application, to consider:

the extent to which the application, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of any adjacent or neighbouring property that is—

- (i) included in the Heritage Register; or
- (ii) subject to a heritage requirement or control in the relevant planning scheme

The extent of the proposed works is confined to the Main Hall of the Melbourne Town Hall building. There will be no impact on the exterior building fabric of the Melbourne Town Hall, and no impact on

the broader streetscape context or neighbouring buildings along Collins Street (as included in the Collins East Precinct (HO504)).

8.0 CONCLUSION

The installation of the LED screens within the Main Hall of the Melbourne Town Hall is a considered and sensitive proposal which has been developed to minimise the impact on fabric and the significant decorative scheme within the space. The CMP anticipates a tolerance for change where the works provide for enhanced functionality and enable the continued community use of the Main Hall. The ongoing use of the Main Hall for its historical purpose in a contemporary environment is a positive outcome and the social significance of the heritage place, as a major venue for public events and entertainment, will be maintained. The works and installation of the screens will have no impact on the historical, architectural or aesthetic significance of the place.

**APPENDIX A:
REASONABLE OR
ECONOMIC USE
DOCUMENTATION**



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Melbourne Town Hall – Installation of LED Screens Reasonable or Economic Use

As part of the City of Melbourne's post Covid strategy to revitalise the city, Melbourne Town Hall has recently engaged a new Venue Management service provider, Showtime Event Group (SEG). SEG have partnered with Scene Change (SC) who will operate as the incumbent audio-visual supplier. This is a 5 + 5-year contract appointment. The contract provides for increased commercial returns to the City of Melbourne as part of Council's fiscal recovery strategy, as well as an uplift in overall patronage and increased access for reasonably priced community use.

SC have provided a significant upgrade to MTH across all aspects of video, audio, lighting, IT, and staging equipment. This upgrade will increase commercial opportunities, and by lowering labour costs, will allow community and council events access to equipment that would generally be out of their budget (noting Community and CoM events receive 50% off the usual commercial hire rates of inhouse AV equipment). This new state of the art AV equipment meets contemporary expectations and makes it an easier decision for clients to use the in-house service and increase revenue streams to the City of Melbourne.

Scene Change is the first national AV company in Australia to offer LED screens across many venues, driven by market demand. Major Melbourne venues, including the Palladium, Centrepiece, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC), Melbourne Olympic Park Trust (MOPT), Grand Hyatt and Crown Casino have already adopted LED screens, establishing this technology as an industry standard.

Using the existing ceiling penetrations, Scene Change has installed contemporary digital lighting and replaced the previous column speakers. This unique design allows sound signals to be split and digitally steered to all corners of the hall. To complete and round out this new system it is proposed to install two LED screens on hoists at the stage end of the hall. This means MTH will be able to provide unique user experiences and be competitive in the Australian event industry by providing complex AV solutions at affordable prices.

The next phase of this upgrade, the installation of LED screens at Melbourne Town Hall (MTH) will position the venue competitively against Melbourne's other major event spaces. The flexibility of the proposed side-mounted screens offers optimal visibility and an immersive experience, accommodating diverse event setups that require IMAG camera or content shown on a different medium. This advantage is expected to attract a broader range of events, create consistent revenue, and strengthen MTH's reputation as a top-tier venue.

Industry reports indicate LED screens are now standard for high-profile events and clients expect this quality of presentation for their larger events. Permanent screens at MTH would make large events more feasible for cost-conscious clients, particularly for community groups and groups requiring enhanced services for accessibility.

Installing LED screens in the Melbourne Town Hall provides an option to enhance accessibility by providing clear, real-time subtitles and sign language interpretation. The high resolution and brightness of LED screens ensure that subtitles remain clearly legible to all patrons in a venue this large, while sign language interpreters can be clearly visible to attendees who rely on them. This makes it easier for individuals with hearing impairments to follow along and engage with the event.

SEG, with the assistance of SC, have analysed the economic impacts of two approaches for the installation of LED screens at the MTH;

Option 1 - The option of hiring the LED screens from a third party for an event which are brought to the MTH, installed/rigged into position and then removed/de-rigged post event and transported back to the third party.

Option 2 - The option of permanently installing the screens into the MTH.

The analysis considers both Commercial clients and Community clients.

The appended spreadsheet tables outline the financial impact of the temporary screens installation scenario with the permanent screens installation scenario.

Notes on economic analysis presented:

- Labour has not been included for general AV services - rig/derig and Technician on Demand (TOD) - as the costs depend on the event duration and they would be the same for all events.
- Labour for the installation and removal of temporary LED screens has been included for the current scenario - Option 1.

The modelling assumes that 35 existing Commercial events and 15 existing Community events will utilise the screens that were previously unable to due to budget restrictions. An additional 25 Commercial and 10 Community events are expected to be attracted to the Melbourne Town Hall due to the installation and associated cost reductions of permanent screens.

The analysis shows that existing and new Commercial clients will benefit from a reduction in costs of \$15,800 per event, resulting in an overall cost saving of \$948,000 p.a. The existing and new Community clients will see a saving of \$17,800 per event which equates to an overall cost saving \$356,000 p.a.

In total, this represents an annual cost saving of \$1,304,000 p.a.

Demand projections by the SEG sales team, based on current industry feedback indicates 100% of clients would opt for the LED AV offering at the proposed pricing where LED screens are permanently installed. This setup is expected to attract new events and enhance existing ones, significantly improving the attendee experience.

By eliminating recurring costs associated with ongoing temporary screen rentals, bump-ins and bump-outs, substantial savings are achieved for the client, making high-quality AV solutions more accessible for events of all sizes. The state-of-the-art screens enhance production value, improve attendee experience, boost client satisfaction, and drive repeat bookings.

Capital Cost to purchase and install the LED screens permanently has been costed at \$142,158. This Capital Cost would be recovered within six months, even with the reduced hire rates applicable in the permanent screens scenario.

With the permanent installation of LED screens, the Melbourne Town Hall can provide state of the art AV in a space that is heavily subsidised for Community Groups. This will allow Community groups to access the space at a cost that has previously precluded those groups from holding events of the same quality in a venue of this size. This will deliver a key objective of the new MTH contract, to provide increased revenues and improved access to Community Groups.

LED screens in Melbourne Town Hall - Permanent vs By Event Installation

All Excl GST unless noted

Option 1 - Temporary Install Typical Screen Hire			
Current cost	Each	Number	Total
Hire \$/screen	\$5,370	2	\$10,740
Labour	\$4,530	2	\$9,060
Total	per event		\$19,800

External Equipment Hire
Bump in/Bump out

Current cost passed onto Clients

Permanent Installation Capital Cost	
Led Screens	\$95,286.00
Rigging/Equipment/controls	\$32,472
Labour	\$14,400
Total	\$142,158

Option 2 - Permanent Install Typical screen hire			
Commercial Client			
Hire \$/screen	\$2,000	2	\$4,000
Labour	Included		\$0
Total Hire Cost			\$4,000
Client saving	per event		\$15,800

Internal Equipment Hire

Client cost reduction p.a. - Commercial			
Events p.a.	Number p.a.	Saving per event	Savings p.a.
Existing	35	\$15,800	\$553,000
New	25	\$15,800	\$395,000
Total	60		\$948,000

Community Group			
Hire \$/screen	\$1,000	2	\$2,000
Labour	Included		\$0
Total Hire Cost			\$2,000
Client saving	per event		\$17,800

Internal Equipment Hire - 50% discount

Client cost reduction p.a. - Community			
Events p.a.	Number p.a.	Saving per event	Savings p.a.
Existing	15	\$17,800	\$267,000
New	10	\$17,800	\$178,000
Total	25		\$445,000

Permanent Screens vs Temp Screens Client cost reduction p.a. - Total			
Events p.a.	Number p.a.	Average Saving per event	Savings p.a.
Total	85	\$16,388	\$1,393,000

Notes

Labour costs for general AV services have not been included (they are the same for all event types)

Labour costs for rigging & de-rigging of the screens (in the temporary scenario) have been included

The equipment costs only refer to the screen costs (Temp or permanent)