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## Heritage Impact Statement

Capitol House, 109-117 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000, VHR471

Capitol Arcade refurbishment



Figure 1. Capitol House, Photograph, c. 1937, source SLV

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**1. Heritage Impact Statement for:**

Capitol House, 109-117 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000, VHR471

**2. Prepared for:**

This report has been prepared for The Capitol Owners Corporation.

**3. Prepared by:**

Michael Taylor Architecture & Heritage.  
Level 6, 443 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000.

**4. Date:** 9 December 2017

**5. The Statement forms part of an application for:**

Capitol Arcade refurbishment.

**6. Heritage Listings:**

**Victorian Heritage Register/Heritage Act 1995**

*Capitol House, 109-117 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Vic 3000, VHR471.*

*Extent of Registration*

*AMENDMENT OF REGISTER OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS Historic Building No. 471.*

*Capitol House, 109-117 Swanston Street, Melbourne.*

*The whole of the building and land shown hatched on the attached plan marked "A" as described in Certificates of Title Volume 4678 Folio 493 and Volume 4678 Folio 433.*

*[Victoria Government Gazette No. G49 13 December 1989 p.3260]*

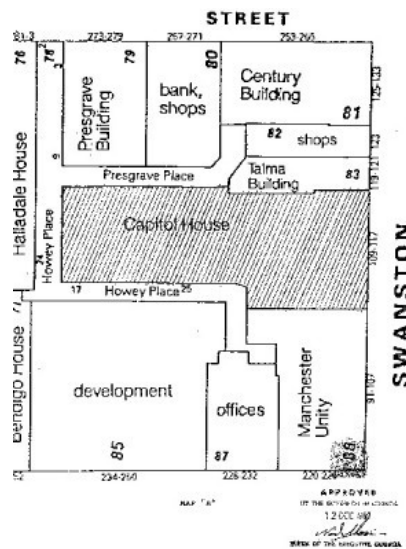


Figure 2. VHR Extent of Registration

**City of Melbourne- Heritage Overlay**

The site has an individual Heritage Overlay, HO747, under the City of Melbourne Planning Scheme.

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## 7. Background to proposed works

The owner's brief for this project is to enhance the visual and commercial appeal of the arcade and its entries.

## 8. Why is the place of heritage significance?

The Victorian Heritage Register's Statement of Significance records the place's architectural, historical, aesthetic and scientific (technical) significance:

*Why is it significant?*

*Capitol House, Melbourne is of architectural significance as a unique expression and highly advanced design concept by the creative and well known architects, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony. It is of significance as one of their greatest works and as their largest commercial building project. Capitol House, Melbourne is of architectural significance for its highly original combination of offices, shops and an entertainment venue in one building. Although not unique, it was an advanced concept at the time, developed on a major scale with the inclusion of a vast auditorium.*

*Capitol House, Melbourne is of historical significance as the first of three great picture palaces built in Melbourne in the 1920s. Predating the Regent Theatre (VHR H0690) and the Forum Theatre (former State Theatre VHR H0438) by five years, it exposed Melburnians to a totally new phenomenon that was to become a fundamental part of popular culture.*

*Capitol House, Melbourne is of historical significance as the focus of one of Melbourne's first conservation campaigns. This included support from the National Trust, the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects and architectural writer, Robin Boyd.*

*Capitol House, Melbourne is of aesthetic significance for its foyers and auditorium interiors, which are extraordinary and were highly advanced in concept in the 1920s. The auditorium ceiling design, with its spectacular lighting effects, is of particular importance.*

*Capitol House, Melbourne is of scientific (technical) significance for its highly innovative structural design which explored the limits of steel and concrete.<sup>1</sup>*

## 9. Current use of the places

The entry and foyer are used by the building's three main elements, namely, Capitol Arcade, Capitol Theatre, and Capitol House. The auditorium was purchased by RMIT in 1998 and is to undergo a renovation in 2018 to accommodate RMIT's Film School.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Heritage Database on line.

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## 10. Existing Condition of the place

The Swanston Street awning is in fair condition and appears to be reasonably intact to the original design. It was restored around 1995 when the 1960s claddings and soffits were removed. The awning has a number of metal signage brackets underneath. The provenance of these brackets isn't known. An illuminated sign on the north fascia is sadly hemmed in the northern neighbour's reproduction verandah.



Figure 3, Capitol House, illuminated sign on north end of the awning, 2017

The Swanston Street foyer is in an altered 1960s form with many small modifications from the last few decades. The arcade also has undergone many small refurbishments and upgrades and is currently cluttered with ad hoc signage, furniture and merchandise displays.



Figure 4, Capitol Arcade, view from foyer, 2017



Figure 5, Capitol House, detailed view of awning soffit and roof light showing general condition, 2017.



Figure 6, Capitol House, arcade entry from Howie Place, 2017

## 11. Scope of proposed works

- Restoration and re-lamping of the canopy and atrium entry form Swanston Street
- Relocation for the existing illuminated "CAPITOL" sign to the centre of the awning
- New glazed entries on Swanston St and Howey Place to assist wayfinding, security and climate control.
- Upgraded entry and tenancy signage, including electronic signage to negate the need for "A" frame signs.
- Upgraded ceiling finishes and lighting to modernise and clean the appearance and commercial appeal.

The works are shown in the DD series drawing set dated 15 December 2017 prepared by Six Degrees Architects. This set includes architect's statement, materials and finishes selections, perspective sketches and drawings.

## 12. What physical and visual effects will result from the proposed works?

### **Awning and Swanston Street foyer.**

Demolition works proposed in the arcade will remove 1960s and later fabric, fittings and finishes. And represent the stairs and foyer with new décor and improved visibility between the arcade, staircase and foyer. These works will affect mostly non original fabric and will appear more open, with a refreshed décor and with improved visibility to the arcade.





Figure 7, Capitol Theatre, existing foyer and stairs 2017

Restoration works to awning shall include cleaning, replacement of missing and damaged glazed “lights”, re-lamping, painting, renewal of suspended signage brackets.

The plaster ceiling to the central foyer shall be removed exposing the original concrete structure above, this shall be finished in a dark contemporary manner to compliment the Arcade’s new décor and appearance.

The proposed glazed screen amidst the foyer shall replace an existing roller shutter it is to accommodate after hours operations, and to draw the arcade threshold and presence closer to Swanston Street.

### Capitol Arcade

The location and footprint of the arcade will remain the same. Shopfronts, signage and décor shall be unified and be in-keeping with the refreshed foyer and auditorium entry.

## 13. What will be the effect on the significance of the place? And how are adverse effects mitigated ?

### Architectural and Aesthetic Significance

Capitol House’s architectural significance as an example of innovative design important architects Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony will be retained and preserved in that; The original combination of combination of offices (now residential), shops and an entertainment venue is retained. The building’s distinct Chicago School external massing, form and detailing will not be affected by the current proposal which are internal works only.

The awning restoration will improve the condition and presentation of this original feature. The proposed relocation of the illuminated “CAPITOL” signage front and centre on the awning will

be a more visible and dignified setting for this sign; and it consistent with earlier disposition of signage (see figure 1 , photo c. 1937).

#### **Historical significance**

Capitol House will remain as the first of the three picture palaces built in Melbourne in the 1920s, all three are included on VHR. The proposed works are in previously altered areas. They will improve the safety and appearance of the foyer and arcade and make a positive contribution to the area's economic viability. ....and program by RMIT are a compatible use as defined by the Burra Charter will continue cinematic use and education by RMIT's film school and public.

#### **Scientific (technical) significance**

Capitol House will also be retained as a physical document of the John Monash designed reinforced concrete. The removal of ground floor foyer ceilings is expected to reveal original reinforced concrete structure.

### **14. Conclusions**

#### **Awning**

The proposed restoration of the Swanston Street Awning and signage is timely maintenance works which will improve the appearance and material integrity of this original structure.

#### **Capitol Arcade**

The proposed refurbishment of the 1960s entry and arcade will be unobtrusive and timely upgrade which will facilitate the area's use and safety.

#### **Physical effects on original and later building fabric**

The works are altering later building fabric and décor. The foyer and arcade works will only alter post 1960s fabric.

#### **Heritage significance**

The works will have little or no adverse effects on the place's architectural, aesthetic, historic and scientific significance.