

Heritage Impact Statement

Palais Theatre, H0947

14 Lower Esplanade, St Kilda, VIC, 3184

Proposed installation of digital signs to main stair newels.

Heritage Act 2017 Permit Exemption Application

19 June 2026



Figure 1, Palais Theatre Main Stair west side, existing conditions.

1. Project details

1.1. Project site

Palais Theatre, 14 Lower Esplanade St Kilda H0947.

1.2. This Heritage Impact Stage forms part of a permit exemption for:

- Installation of digital columns x 4 to main stair newel posts.
- Period of installation to be 7 years.

Please refer to the drawing set by MTA&H.

1.3. Prepared for:

Live Nation Australia

1.4. Prepared by:

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

1.5. Date:

19 June 2026

2. Significance of the place or object

2.1. Heritage Listings & Studies

Heritage Act 2017

The Palais Theatre is included on the *Victorian Heritage Register* (H0947). The extent of registration includes the building and a small curtilage of land on three sides, as shown by Diagram 947.

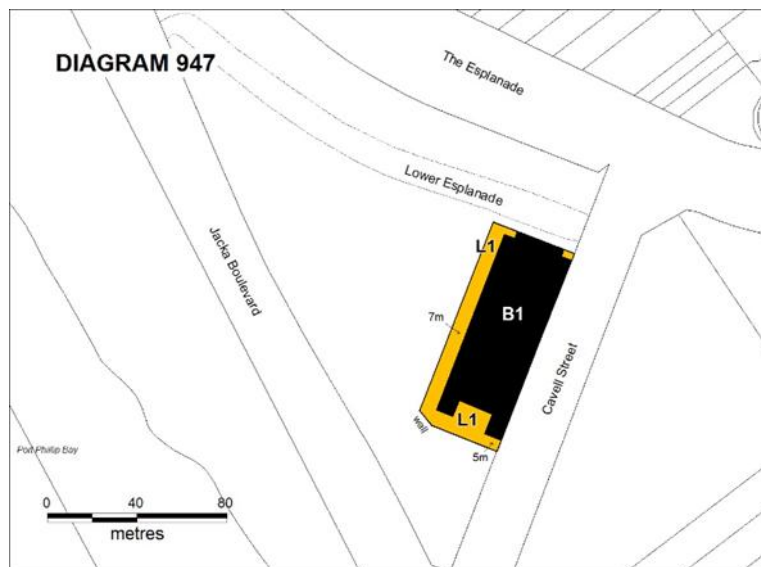


Figure 2 , Extent of Registration VHR 947, (source VHR database online)

City of Port Phillip

The theatre is located within two local Heritage Overlays under the *City of Port Phillip* (CoPP) Planning Scheme:

- HO184 Palais Theatre, a site-specific overlay.
- HO5 St Kilda Hill heritage precinct.

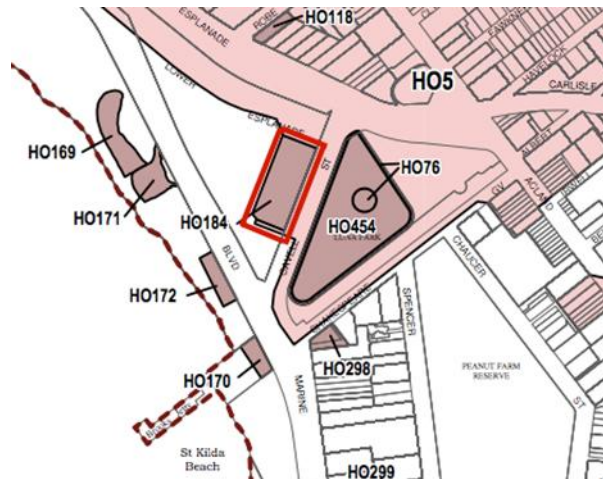


Figure 3, Palais Theatre (HO184). Source: CoPP Planning Scheme Map No. 6 City of Port Phillip

2.2. Cultural heritage significance of the place or object

The Palais Theatre, St Kilda is of architectural and historical significance to the State of Victoria.

The Palais Theatre, St Kilda is of architectural significance as a relatively rare, and substantially intact, example of a large scale, free standing 1920s picture palace. The general intactness of the exterior and the retention of original internal decorative schemes, including original lighting and applied decoration, furniture and fittings, enhances its significance.

The Palais Theatre, St Kilda is of architectural significance as an example of the work of prominent and influential cinema architect, Henry E. White. It was his largest theatre project in Melbourne and the only theatre designed, rather than refurbished, by him in Victoria. The early/original decorative scheme and the furniture and fittings, mainly designed by Melbourne firm A.E. Higgins, enhance the significance of the theatre as does the suite of William Bedford light fittings (some of which are now located off-site). The Bedford lights are significant as they were specifically designed for the Palais Theatre by a pre-eminent manufacturer of lights and because of their rarity due to the intactness of the suite of lights.

The Palais Theatre, St Kilda is of historical significance for its association with the development of St Kilda as an important seaside resort and as an integral part of the St Kilda foreshore entertainment complex. Its vast scale and solid construction reflect the confidence in the location and the medium of film, by the 1920s.

The Palais Theatre, St Kilda is of historical significance for its continuous association with a major form of popular entertainment in the twentieth century. This includes its original association with American entrepreneurs, the Phillips brothers, and its continued

operation through the 1960s-1980s when many other amusements in the vicinity were closed, demolished or burnt down.¹

2.3. Background – Heritage Act Permit Exemption Application P42134 March 2026

A Heritage Permit Exemption application for x 4, 621mm diameter signs was lodged in March 2026. This application was refused as an exemption and the matter directed to be a permit application.

The refusal letter dated 16 March 2026 recommended that a permit application includes following additional information.

- *Details of alternative options which have been explored for the display of signage including location and type of signage considered.'*

Response -Four options, including the preferred option, are included in this application. Refer attached drawing set.

- *Details of how the proposal aligns with the policies of the Conservation Management Plan.*

Response -The CMP by Lovell Chen issued June 2026 doesn't include a specific policy regarding internal signage. It has a specific policy for external signage 5.5.8 *Signage* which notes that theatres have extensive and variable signage for events.

Other policies relating to the foyer, *Policy 5.5.2 Adaptation and new works* and *5.5.3 Specific Policies* are of a general nature with an emphasis to maintain the foyers intact and as a single volume with no physical subdivision. The policies allow for changes within the foyers provided the works can be removed with no adverse effects on the original building fabric.

In regard to the proposed installation of four digital signs the works would be additive to the room without be reductive of any original fabric, and the signs could be removed readily at the end of their seven year life without any material impacts on the newels.

The signage is designed to have legible visibility of static displays and will be visible in the foyers when activated for events. The visibility is offset by the liveliness of the foyers in event mode which are densely populated and dynamic environments as patrons move in and out of the venue on mass over short periods.

The relevant policies are included below.

¹ Victorian Heritage Register Palais Theatre VHR0947, Statement of Significance

Policy 5.5.2 Adaptation and new works

Policy: Adaptation of and new works to significant spaces or elements should not detract from the overall cultural significance of the place. As identified in the assessment of significance, the Palais Theatre is distinguished from other examples of 1920s picture palaces in Victoria by a relatively high level of intactness. The exterior is little altered and the principal public Interiors - foyers and associated stairs, cloakrooms and washrooms, and auditorium, together with the stage - also remain essentially intact to the extent of their plan form and fabric, including applied decoration, lighting and other fittings and furnishings, including the auditorium seating (albeit reupholstered).

The conservation policies allow for adaptation of some areas of primary significance. The primary conservation aim is the retention of their significance, and consequently, adaptive reuse should involve minimal physical alteration to significant fabric, should not adversely affect the exterior of the building, the Interior spatial quality or decoration and should be sympathetic to the building, its setting and surrounds.

Where change is required, it should avoid permanent intervention into areas and elements of primary significance and all changes and installations in these areas should be reversible, i.e., not requiring significant reconstruction, when no longer required. Works in areas of contributory and little or no significance could be more extensive without substantial loss to the overall significance of the building. In the case of contributory areas and elements, adaptation of these spaces is possible, however, the approach should be to attempt to maintain as much of the original layout as possible.

5.5.3 Specific Policies:

Retain and conserve the ground floor and dress circle foyers and connecting stairs to the extent of all original or early plan form and fabric, including applied decoration and light fittings.

The entry sequence and experience is considered to be critical to an understanding and appreciation of the Palais Theatre and its original design intent and decorative schemes. The foyer spaces and stairs are relatively intact and retain original decoration (albeit modified) and light fittings.

The foyers and stairs should be retained and conserved to the extent of their original or early plan form, fabric, light fittings, doors and door furniture. The spaces should not be subdivided.

5.5.8 Signage

Policy: The construction of new permanent external signage should be avoided. Temporary signage can be as required providing that it does not damage the historic fabric.

Theatres have traditionally used extensive signage both to advertise the venue and its current and forthcoming shows, and the Palais Theatre is no exception.

In this regard such buildings can be seen in a different light from other building types.

Temporary signs could be fixed to the lower sections of the east facade or elsewhere on the building as required, providing these do not physically impact on the fabric. If required, larger temporary signs designed for particular shows could be attached to the awning. While such signs do not enhance the presentation of the building and are not desirable from a conservation perspective, they are considered acceptable on a temporary basis.

- *Details of the location of the former candelabras and discussion as to their removal and possibility of reinstatement.*

The original candelabra are believed to be in possession of former leaseholder Caroline Harper and held in storage. Live Nation has made enquiries via Ms. Harper's solicitor about the candelabra return to the Palais on a purchase or loan basis, but no response has been received. Live Nation has left communications with the solicitor open for future advice or change in circumstances.

- *Discussion of reasonable and economic use with regard to the proposed commercial advertising and revenue, including discussion regarding the proportion of use for internal (hirers, fan experience, in-house communication) verses external advertising (commercial sponsors and general advertising). See below under section 4.0.*

These are addressed below.

2.4. Current use of the place

The Palais Theatre is used as a live performing arts venue. It is owned by the State of Victoria (DWELP) with the City of Port Phillip as committee of management.

Live Nation (Australasia) are the site managers LNA holds a 30-year lease of the venue which commenced in April 2017.

2.5. Existing condition of the place

Palais Theatre- Ground floor foyer and main stairs.

The ground floor foyer is a rectangular plan- shaped entry area with ground floor doors to the stalls seating, and a pair of main stairs designed and built on a large scale. The foyer underwent restoration in 2018 and is reasonably intact to the original form, materials and appearance. Additions from the 2018 works includes installation of a merchandise counter and candy bar. Prior to that time c. 2010 a previous operator removed a number of fixed chattels/light fittings and loose furniture. The main stairs' newels were originally surmounted by brass candelabra. These items are believed to be in storage and there may be an opportunity for their reinstatement in the future when recovered.

This foyer is the main and only entry for all event patrons. The venue has a patron capacity of 2986 seats with a near equal distribution of seats between ground floor stalls and the upper balcony, lounge and upper dress circle. All upper level patrons need to traverse one of the two main stairs to enter and leave the venue.



Figure 4, Palais Theatre, main foyer, photograph 2025

3. Proposed works

3.1. The proposed works

- Installation of x 4, 611mm diameter circular digital signs, one each on the top of main stair newels for seven years (the operational life of the units).
- The installation to include a base and mounting plate and top plate to ameliorate the units appearance and improve architectural integration on top of the newels.
- Power supply and wiring to be reticulated using original candelabra's and wiring route and services aperture in newel top.

3.2. Proposed operation and use

- Signs will only operate while the venue is holding an event, which is estimated at between 160 to 190 times a year predominately between the hours of 6pm and midnight Monday to Sunday.
- Digital signage content time is expected to be allocated as follows, however this may vary from time to time depending on operational needs and demand.
 - Commercial – 60% (sponsors, suppliers, general advertising)

- Hirers – 20% (advertising upcoming shows from all promoters)
- Fan Experience – 10% (general fan communication, special offers, memberships, VIP offering, etc)
- In-house Communication – 10% (way finding, patron information, emergency management, etc)

Please refer to the included drawing package by MTA&H for the scope of works and existing conditions photos.

3.3. Impact of the proposal on the cultural heritage significance of the place or object

3.3.1. Physical impacts

Physical Impacts- The proposed digital columns may be installed for the seven year display with no physical impacts on the building fabric, particularly the top of newels. An existing services aperture which the original candelabra was fitted to and wired via may be re-used for fixing and wiring.

3.3.2. Visual Impacts

The proposed digital columns would be an additive and ultimately reversible or removable installation in the main foyer. The signs are positioned to be visible so that they can perform the task of visual communication of information. They would be ameliorated by their relatively small size within a large and richly ornamented interior, which is very lively before and after an event, and they would not overwhelm or dominate this large space's interior.

Close consideration has been given to the signages' circular/column form and dimensions which have been selected to compliment and integrate with the newel posts' shape and proportions.

3.3.3. Options considered

Four options were considered

- Option 1- x 4, 611mm diameter signs. This is the preferred option.
- Option 1a x 4, 410mm diameter signs. This option was investigated as a smaller circular digital sign but has been deemed to be not functional or feasible for signage in this space. The smaller sign was assessed by Stefanos Fernandez, Vice President, Digital Technology, Live Nation who advised.

Minimum Viable Diameter for Proposed LED Columns

The proposed LED columns are intended to serve as a digital interpretation of traditional venue advertising, event promotion, and visitor communication infrastructure. In addition to commercial messaging, the displays will support venue information, accessibility and safety information, sponsor acknowledgements, event announcements, wayfinding and operational communications. To perform these functions effectively, the displays must be capable of presenting legible, accessible and recognisable content at typical viewing distances within the venue environment.

As part of the design development process, smaller-format LED columns with a diameter of approximately 410mm were investigated. While technically feasible, this format was determined to be insufficient for the intended communication purpose. The reduced display width significantly limits the legibility of text, event information, sponsor acknowledgements and accessibility-related messaging. It also restricts the effective presentation of standard vertical digital creative formats commonly used throughout the entertainment, events and live music industries.

The proposed displays utilise a vertical format consistent with contemporary digital advertising standards, including widely adopted 4:5 and 9:16 creative formats used across digital media platforms. These formats are now the predominant content standard for event promotion and audience engagement. At a diameter of 410mm, the available display width requires content to be substantially simplified or redesigned, reducing the effectiveness of the display and limiting the ability to repurpose existing campaign assets. Critical elements such as headlines, event details, branding, sponsor logos and QR codes become increasingly difficult to read or interact with at normal viewing distances.

By comparison, a 610mm diameter column provides approximately 49% greater display width than a 410mm column. This additional width materially improves readability, visual clarity and overall user experience. It enables the effective display of industry-standard content formats while maintaining appropriate text sizes, image proportions and visual hierarchy. The larger diameter also supports the presentation of event posters, venue information, ticketing promotions, sponsor acknowledgements and operational messaging without requiring extensive redesign of content.

Importantly, the increased diameter is sought to achieve functional performance rather than to increase the visual prominence of the installation. The difference between 410mm and 610mm primarily affects the usability and effectiveness of the display as a communication medium rather than its role within the broader architectural setting. Within the scale of the venue environment, the increase in diameter does not materially alter the visual character of the installation but does significantly improve its ability to fulfil its intended purpose.

Accordingly, the proposed 610mm diameter represents the “minimum practical dimension” necessary to achieve the operational, communication and accessibility outcomes of the installation. A smaller diameter would compromise the functionality of the display, diminish its effectiveness as a venue communication medium and limit its ability to accommodate contemporary digital content formats that are now standard across the live entertainment industry. The proposal therefore seeks the smallest effective intervention capable of delivering the required outcomes while maintaining an appropriate relationship with the heritage fabric and character of the place.

- Option 2. double sided bollard signs modelled on the existing mobile signage bollard with printed A4 sized inserts, deployed throughout the venue for queuing etc. Not adopted as the flat screens don't offer the flexibility of 60 degree/all around visibility and would not be legible from oblique views on the stair.

- Option 3.0- flat screens x 4 on walls flanking stairs. This adopted the current schema of LED screens used for bar menus, merchandise stand info and coming events

4. Reasons why the proposed works should be supported s101(2)(a) the extent to which the application, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of the registered place or registered object.

The proposed digital columns would be an additive and reversible or removable installation in the main foyer. The signs are positioned to be visible so that they can perform the task of visual communication of information. They would be ameliorated by their relatively small size within a large and richly ornamented interior, and they would not overwhelm or dominate this large space's interior.

Reasons why the proposed works should be supported s101(2)(b) the extent to which the application, if refused, would affect the reasonable or economic use of the registered place or registered object:...

Estimated Revenue Generation & building maintenance,

It is estimated the average annual revenue stream will be around \$108,000 over the estimate 7-year life of the screens, which will assist with the costs of operating, maintaining, and enhancing the Palais Theatre which Live Nation have constantly been undertaking since taking over operational management of the Venue in 2017. However, the costs of operating, maintaining, and enhancing the venue are constantly increasing and Live Nation continues to find new, innovative, and appropriate ways to increase revenue it can continue to invest in the Palais Theatre.

4.0 Summary/Conclusions

- **Digital column signage**
The proposed signs would be a new element within the main foyer; they present a new way to introduce useful event and other information within the busy main foyer. The application is for a fixed period of seven years only.
- **Physical and visual impacts**
The circular column signs have been selected to integrate with the form and scale of the main stair newels which are circular large and heavy. The signs are a relatively small element within the context of the spacious and richly decorated foyer which is a heavily populated and dynamic areas during events when patrons are entering and leaving the venue.
- **Use and economic considerations**
The columns commercial and promoter signage use would provide revenue to cover the installation with additional funds for the operator's ongoing maintenance and improvements programs which are part of the lease-hold, while others are operator-driven to improve venue operations, safety and use. The signage would make an improved revenue stream to conserve the building and maintain operations for the compatible use of an auditorium for public assembly and performance.

