

La Mama Carlton Courthouse 345-349 Drummond Street Carlton

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

SEPTEMBER 2026



PETER ANDREW BARRETT



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land the Wurundjeri
Woi Wurrung, their Elders past and present.



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As the Custodians of this land the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung have the longest connection to Country of any individual, organisation or government. Country encapsulates all values, places, resources, stories, spiritual and cultural meanings intrinsic to this place.

We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their lands from where this report was prepared and will be read.



*Front Cover: Architectural drawing of the Carlton Courthouse façade and its detailing. Prepared by the Public Works Department of Victoria.
Source of image: Public Records Office Victoria*

Heritage Impact Statement for: -

VHR H-1467 [La Mama] Carlton Courthouse 345-349 Drummond Street Carlton.

This statement forms part of a permit application for: -

Proposed alterations to La Mama Carlton Courthouse to provide improved accessibility to the theatre.

This Heritage Impact Statement is prepared by:

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For:

La Mama

Date:

10 September 2026



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Purpose of this heritage impact statement:

This heritage impact statement assesses a proposal to improve accessibility to the La Mama Carlton Courthouse.

The La Mama Carlton Courthouse is included on the Heritage Council of Victoria *Victorian Heritage Register* as a place of State significance - *VHR H-1467*. This heritage impact statement assesses the proposed works under the Heritage Act 2017.

This theatre is also identified as an individually significant heritage place in the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* – HO43 Carlton Court House (*sic*), 345-349 Drummond Street, Carlton.

La Mama Carlton Courthouse is classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) as a building of State significance – Place ID: 64806. There are no statutory constraints arising from this National Trust of Australia (Victoria) classification.

Given the recognised cultural significance of La Mama Carlton Courthouse, this heritage impact statement seeks to address the following questions in relation to the proposed works:

- Has the design addressed the Local Planning Scheme heritage provisions?
- What significant physical and/or visual detrimental impacts will result from the proposed works, and their effects on the cultural significance of this heritage place?



- If there are impacts, the reasons why the proposal should be permitted?
- What measures are proposed to mitigate any heritage impacts?
- Are the proposed works, on balance, a satisfactory outcome, given the recognised heritage values intrinsic to this site?

Sources of information

This heritage impact statement is prepared with regard to the Australia ICOMOS, *Burra Charter: The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance*, 2013, which is the standard of heritage practice in Australia.

This heritage impact statement is prepared with reference to the citation for the subject site in the *Victorian Heritage Register*.¹

In assessing this proposal, the heritage policies in the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* have been reviewed, these being Clause 15.03 Heritage and Clause 43.01 Heritage Overlay.

The proposal assessed is that documented in the set of drawings prepared by Construction Building Design (CBD), which are titled 'Alterations & Additions at La Mama Courthouse', Revision E, dated 14 August 2026 (cover sheet). This heritage impact statement must be read in conjunction with these drawings.

When preparing this heritage impact statement, historical sources have been reviewed. Where these are relevant in the preparation of this report, they are referenced in footnotes and/or captions. This includes original drawings of the complex, and drawings of some twentieth century alterations, that are held by the Public Record Office Victoria.

The subject site was inspected on 22 July 2026 and was reinspected on 5 August 2026 while amending the design to provide a finer heritage response. Both the interior and the exterior was inspected on both inspections.

1 Victorian Heritage Database – VHR H1467 Carlton Court House, <https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/216/download-report>, retrieved 8 September 2026.



*Figure 1: Carlton
Courthouse. Source of
image: La Mama.*



The cultural heritage significance of the place and its setting?

The La Mama Carlton Courthouse is recognised by the Heritage Council of Victoria as a place of State significance.

The City of Melbourne recognises the La Mama Carlton Courthouse to be a place of Local significance.

Why is the place of cultural heritage significance?

The Carlton Courthouse is recognised by the Heritage Council of Victoria as a place of State significance. Its recognised heritage values of architectural and historical significance to Victoria are noted in the statement of significance to derive from:

The Carlton Court House is architecturally significant as a highly unusual Gothic style design by the Public Works Department. The Gothic style was not generally favoured by the Department



during the 1880s and 1890s. The composition of intersecting transverse gables presents a strikingly bold facade to the street.

The Carlton Court House is historically significant as part of the civic core of Drummond Street. It is directly opposite the 1878 Carlton Police Station. The Court House was illustrative of the rise in the commercial and social status of the area in the 1880s. The Police Station and Court House are also reminders that the 19th century city was far from being an idyllic, trouble-free place, and that the expansion of settlement everywhere was accompanied by the expansion of the institutions of law and order.

The proposed works will not impact upon these recognised heritage values as defined in this statement of significance.

Current use of the place?

An independent theatre.

Existing condition of the place?

At the time the site was inspected it was well-maintained and in good condition.

Site & environs



Figure 2: Aerial view of the La Mama Carlton Courthouse (delineated with the dashed blue line). The former Carlton Police Station (shaded) is visible diagonally opposite in Drummond Street. The two buildings are evidence of the enforcement of law and order in Carlton in earlier years. Source of image: Vicplan



La Mama Carlton Courthouse theatre is situated on the west side of Drummond Street, between Faraday and Elgin streets, Carlton. The building served as the Carlton Court House from the time of its completion c1887 until the 1990s, when it became a theatre.

Designed by G B H Austin of the Public Works Department of Victoria, the use of the Gothic Revival style for a courthouse is not common in Victoria, with Classical Revival usually the preferred style in the nineteenth century. The recessed entrance of the courthouse is expressed with three arches. The porch is enclosed with heavy cast-iron gates. From one door on the side of the porch the magistrates entered the building, from the other door the public. Prisoners entered the court from a cell at the rear of the courthouse.

With the former Carlton Police Station and its rear lock-up, the former Carlton Courthouse forms a precinct of buildings related to the enforcement of law and order in the late nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth century. This history is visually evident in the fabric on both buildings.

The proposal



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The purpose of the proposed works is primarily to improve accessibility to the complex for theatre workers and visitors to the theatre. Currently, accessibility, due to the age of the complex, is not DDA compliant.

The works involve building a ramp along the north elevation of the building within the side setback. The stone landing on the Drummond Street boundary is to be altered to remove the existing step of the landing to make it DDA compliant. The ramp will access the interior of the building at a wall opening reconfigured from a window to a door. This wall opening is part of a small addition to the building completed in the 1920s. An adjacent door, part of the 1880s building, which becomes redundant as the ramp extends in front of it, will be reconfigured as a window.

Internally, a new wall opening is to be made in the foyer that will provide internal access to a WC, which is currently only accessible from the exterior with no weather protection for staff or patrons.

Figure 3: Floor plan, 1903, showing original floor plan. The future location of the 1925 addition on the north elevation is indicated with an arrow. Note the former doorway on the rear wall of the existing Technical Store which is now removed. Source of image: Public Records Office Victoria.

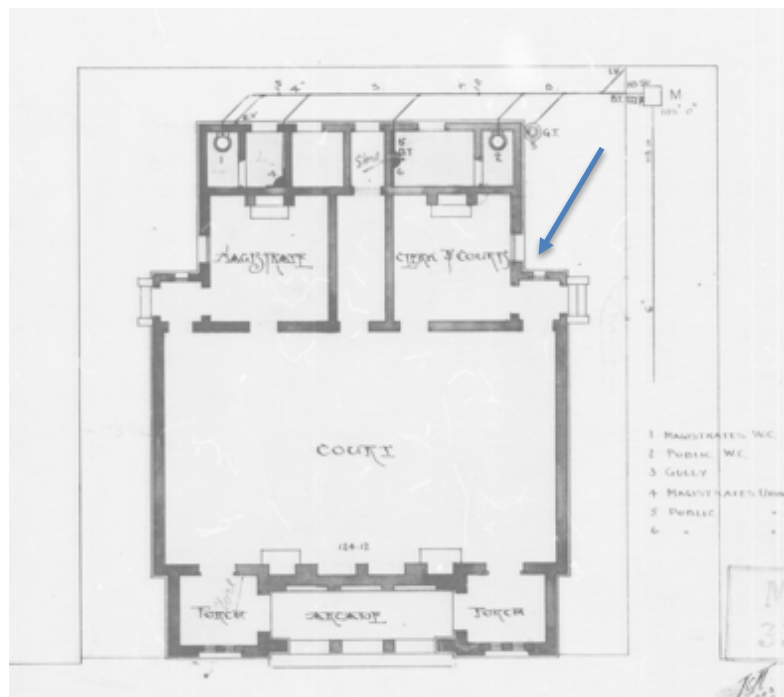
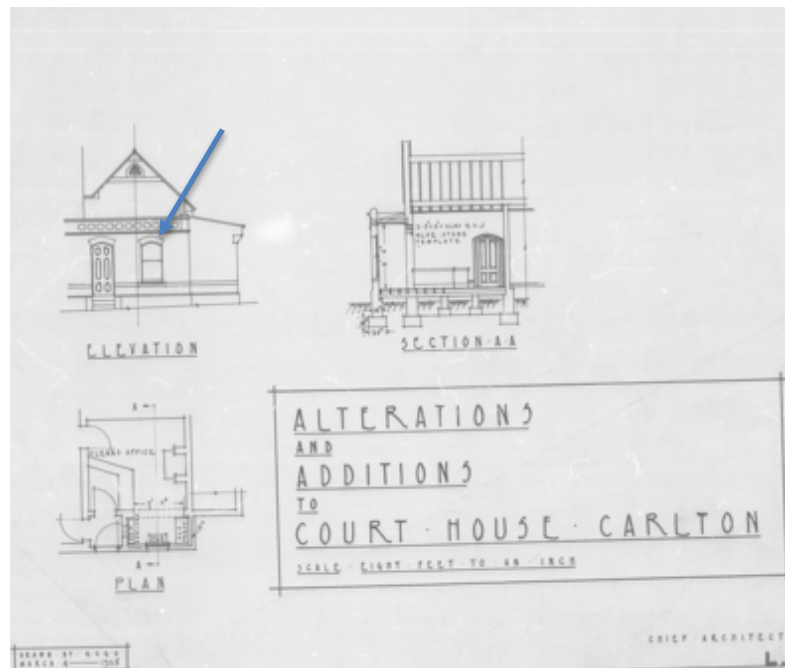


Figure 4: The small addition to the north elevation of the courthouse completed in 1925. The window to be reconfigured as a door in the proposed works is shown with an arrow. Source of image: Public Records Office Victoria.



On the south elevation, at rear, an existing window opening is to be enlarged to fit a bi-fold door that will provide access from the Dressing Room to the exterior. The Dressing Room currently is accessed from the exterior by a door with a step in a small vestibule, making this non DDA compliant.

The works involve conservation measures. Architraves removed from windows and doors as part of the proposed works, are to be salvaged and will replace damaged architraves on other doors and windows.

Elsewhere, a timber cupboard of early origin beside the fireplace, which is to be removed to fit a new door, will be fitted in the Technical Store.

Doors, window frames and stone sills and thresholds that are removed will be salvaged and re-used on other wall openings, where practical. Where existing fabric cannot be re-used at this time, it is to be stored safely and securely on site, for potential use at a future time.



Options Considered

In providing better access to the La Mama Carlton Courthouse, this proposal was considered the most responsive.

Further refinements were made to the proposal to minimise impacts to fabric and where change was to occur the fabric removed is proposed for re-use where possible on other parts of the building where fabric is currently removed or damaged. Examples of this are the wall openings on the north elevation that are to be reconfigured as door and window openings – refer to Figure 5 in this heritage impact statement.

Has the proposal been influenced by, or had to address, local planning scheme heritage provisions?

The La Mama Carlton Courthouse has a site-specific heritage overlay in the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* - HO43 Carlton Court House (*sic*), 345-349 Drummond Street, Carlton.

A purpose of the heritage overlay, as defined by Clause 43.01 Heritage Overlay of the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* is to conserve and enhance heritage places, and to ensure that new works to them do not adversely affect their recognised heritage values. Clause 15.03 Heritage in the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* has similar objectives. Any works to the La Mama Carlton Courthouse must be consistent with these conservation policies.

To understand what needs to be conserved and enhanced in a heritage place its statement of significance will provide guidance. The City of Melbourne Building Identification Form² for the Carlton Courthouse notes its significance to be derived from:

This Court House was erected at the height of the 'Battle of the Styles' in the Public Works Department, a period of great innovation in the Department. It has a highly unusual building form, appropriate to its superb adoption of the Gothic Revival

2 City of Melbourne, Building Identification Form No 11650942, <https://heritagemap.melbourne.vic.gov.au/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=2cb92f6edbd45b9ba16bda968888546>, retrieved 8 September 2026.



style. Its location, opposite the police station of 1877, is crucial in this Drummond Street – Elgin Street area.

The proposed works will not impact upon these recognised heritage values noted by the City of Melbourne.

Clause 43.01 Heritage Overlay of the *Melbourne Planning Scheme* requires that the responsible authority in considering proposed must consider appropriate (**Bold my comments**):

- *The Municipal Planning Strategy and the Planning Policy Framework.*
- *The significance of the heritage place and whether the proposal will adversely affect the natural or cultural significance of the place.*
- *Any applicable statement of significance (whether or not specified in the schedule to this overlay), heritage study and any applicable conservation policy.*
- *Any applicable heritage design guideline specified in the schedule to this overlay.*
- *Whether the location, bulk, form or appearance of the proposed building will adversely affect the significance of the heritage place. Not applicable.*
- *Whether the location, bulk, form and appearance of the proposed building is in keeping with the character and appearance of adjacent buildings and the heritage place. Not applicable.*
- *Whether the demolition, removal or external alteration will adversely affect the significance of the heritage place.*
- *Whether the proposed works will adversely affect the significance, character or appearance of the heritage place.*
- *Whether the proposed subdivision will adversely affect the significance of the heritage place. Not applicable.*
- *Whether the proposed subdivision may result in development which will adversely affect the significance, character or appearance of the heritage place. Not applicable.*
- *Whether the proposed sign will adversely affect the significance, character or appearance of the heritage place. Not applicable.*
- *Whether the lopping or development will adversely affect the health, appearance or significance of the tree. Not applicable.*



- *Whether the location, style, size, colour and materials of the proposed solar energy system will adversely affect the significance, character or appearance of the heritage place. Not applicable*

The proposed works will not impact upon the recognised heritage values of the La Mama Carlton Courthouse, as described in the statement(s) of significance.

The recessive location of the alterations, in the most part, to the sides and rear of the building, will not affect the appearance of the heritage place to any appreciable level from the public realm (Drummond Street). Where the works are visible from within the site, the works are prepared to complement the existing materials and detailing of the building and have minimised change to fabric as much as practical.

What significant detrimental physical and visual impacts will result from the proposed works?

There are no significant physical and visual impacts that will result from the proposed works. It is acknowledged that the proposal will alter parts of the rear and sides of the building, but the level of change is considered acceptable for these locations. When the works are balanced with the improved accessibility the works will provide to the complex, they are considered acceptable.

If there are impacts, why should the proposal be permitted?

There are no significant detrimental impacts from the proposed works. The minor impacts from the proposed works are considered acceptable given the improved accessibility and can be mitigated by sensitive detailing where change is to occur. Re-use of removed fabric will also work to mitigate impacts – refer to the next section.

What measures can be adopted to mitigate any minor impacts from the proposed works and/or provide a better heritage response?

The following will mitigate any minor impacts from the proposed works and/or provide a finer heritage response.



The applicant has adopted recommendations that materials that are to be removed are salvaged and re-used, wherever practical.

An example of re-use of materials that are to be removed is the re-use of a door and window on reconfigured openings on the north elevation.

An existing cupboard in the Foyer, is to be removed and refitted in the Technical Store. An architrave salvaged from an altered door opening will be re-used to replace a damaged architrave on the doorway to the Technical Store etc.

Other materials that cannot be re-used or repurposed on the building, should be stored safely and securely on site for appropriate future use. Each item stored should be labelled to identify its original purpose and from what part of the building it is from.

In some cases, redundant fabric should be retained in place. The former door on the north elevation that is to be reconfigured into a window, will have its bluestone step retained, which will provide visual/physical evidence of this former doorway.

Figure 5: A portion of the demolition plan, showing how an existing door and window are to be re-used.
Source of image: CBD.

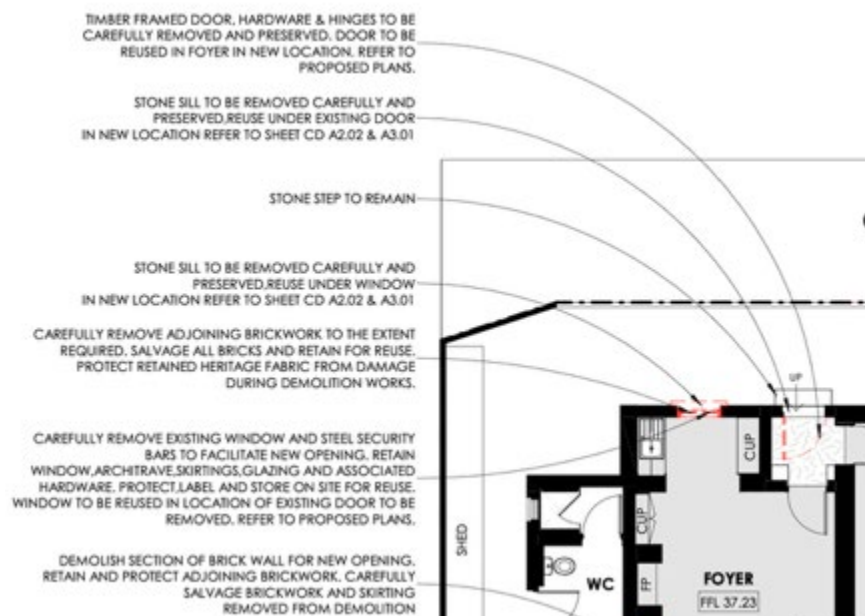


Figure 6: Early timber joinery in the foyer, to be removed to fit a door opening, will be salvaged and refitted in the Technical Store. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.

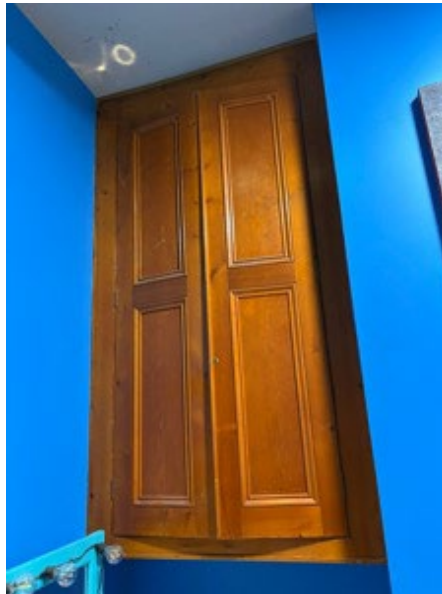
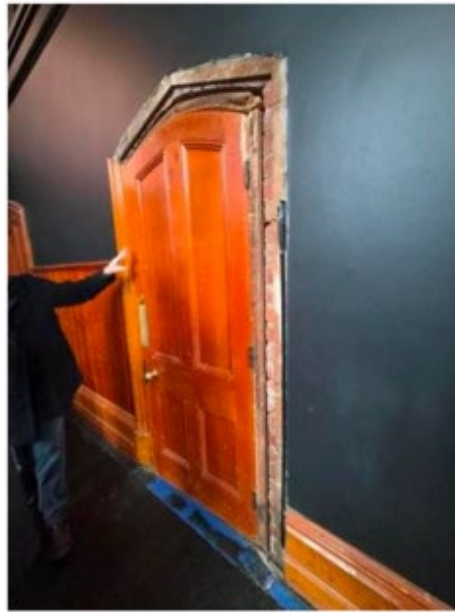


Figure7: Fabric removed can be used to replace removed or damaged original fabric. An example is re-using removed portions of architraves where the original architrave is missing from the Technical Store door. Source of image: Peter Andrew Barrett Collection.



Are the proposed works, on balance, a satisfactory outcome, given the recognised heritage values intrinsic to this site and its environs?

The works proposed are considered acceptable from a heritage perspective.

The proposed works are consistent with the intent of the Heritage Act 2017 (a), which is to provide for the protection and conservation of items that form the cultural heritage of Victoria.

Heritage places must be places that are accessible to all members of the community. The success of this building as a place that is known, used and valued by the community has been its ability to adapt to change in terms of use, but also its fabric's ability to facilitate this change.

The proposed works will provide better accessibility to the complex and will ensure that it remains a heritage asset used by all sections of the community including the aged, disabled and others in the community where accessibility is a challenge.



The proposed works are prepared with satisfactory regard to the building's recognised heritage values. Impacts from the proposed works on original or early fabric are minor and can be managed so as not to diminish this site's recognised cultural heritage values. The impacts from the modest level of change proposed to this heritage place is outweighed by the benefits that improved access will bring to this theatre and its patrons, ensuring the theatre continues to be an important part of Melbourne's cultural landscape.

Conclusion

The proposed works are consistent with the intent of the Heritage Act 2017 (a), which is to provide for the conservation of items that form the cultural heritage of Victoria. The works, in my view, will not impact upon the recognised heritage values of La Mama Carlton Courthouse to any appreciable level.

It is on this basis, that this proposal is supportable from a heritage perspective.



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