

Wellington Town Hall
101 Wakefield Street



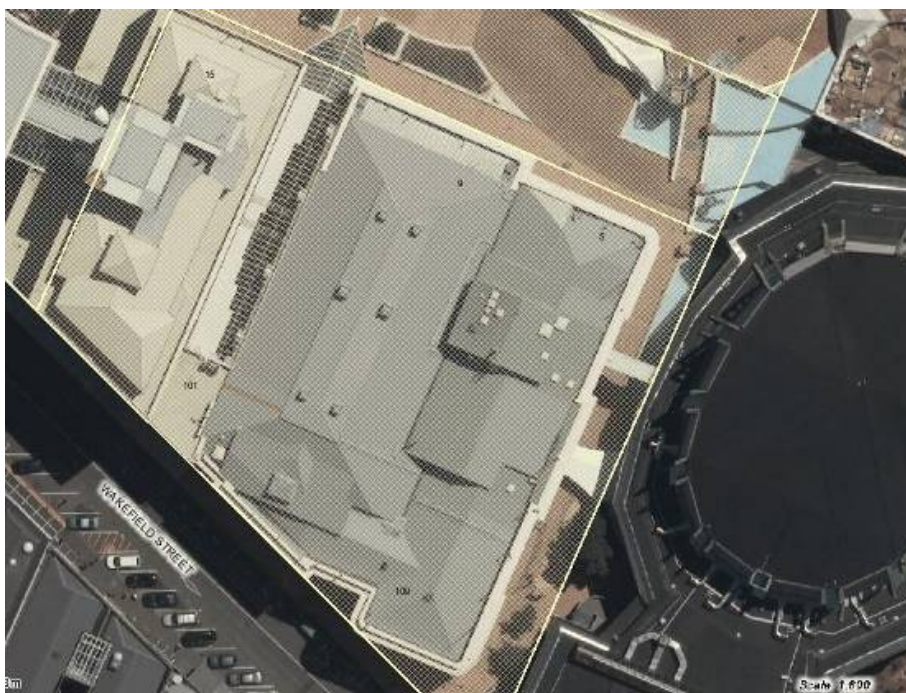
Images: Charles Collins, 2015

Summary of heritage significance

- The Wellington Town Hall is arguably the greatest design by Joshua Charlesworth, one of the pre-eminent Wellington architects around the turn of the last century. The exterior has been modified as a response to both the 1931 Hawkes Bay and 1942 Wellington/Wairarapa earthquakes and the clock-tower, and much of the external ornament has been removed. The building is notable for its fine interiors, particularly the entrance, stairways and auditorium. The concert chamber has international recognition for its fine acoustic qualities – particularly for orchestral music.
- The Town hall, with its concert hall, concert chamber and reception room, council chambers and municipal offices, have been a central to the governance and cultural life of Wellington for over 100 years.
- The Wellington Town Hall is a landmark building that defines part of the southern boundary of Wellington's Civic Square. The square is the pre-eminent public space in central Wellington, and is widely used by Wellingtonians and visitors alike

District Plan:	Map 17, reference 325
Legal Description:	Lots 2-14 DP 10801 Sec 1 SO 35243 & SO 35628
Heritage Area:	Civic Centre Heritage Area
HPT Listed:	Category One, reference 3275
Archaeological Site:	NZAA Central City R27/270; Part Reclamation 'K' 1889 R27/456
Key physical dates:	Built: 1902-04
Architect / Builder:	Architect: Joshua Charlesworth. Builder: Paterson, Martin, and Hunter.
Former uses:	Civic/Government and administration – Town Hall
Current uses:	Civic/Government and administration – Town Hall
Earthquake Prone Status:	Earthquake Prone – SR 169968

Extent: Cityview GIS 2013



1.0 Outline History

1.1 History

Town halls are central to the civic life of all communities, and the Wellington Town Hall is no exception. It has great historic value as the scene of civic, receptions, banquets, balls, flower shows, jumble sales, boxing matches, exhibitions, college prize giving ceremonies, organ recitals, concerts by the National Orchestra, and performances by bands as famous as the Beatles. It provides an incredibly versatile space in its main auditorium, one that has been internationally acclaimed for its fine acoustic qualities for orchestral music. It was the recording venue for much of the 'Lord of the Rings' movie soundtracks for which composer Howard Shore won three Academy Awards and four Grammy awards.

In 1875, the Wellington City Council organised a competition for the design of a Town Hall and offices to be sited in Brandon Street. The competition was won by Thomas Turnbull, with a proposal for an 'ornate as well as substantial' design 'with a tower in the centre'. Turnbull's design was, however, never completed and only one wing of the building was constructed. This served as the Council offices for the following two decades.¹

By the 1890s, the city was growing quickly and the lack of a town hall, where a council administration and a venue for major public events could be combined in one place, was becoming an urgent matter. Land had been set aside during the 1886-1890 reclamation of Jervois Quay and in 1900 the Council finally decided to build a town hall at a cost of £50,000. Architects were invited to compete and send designs for a new town hall and municipal buildings that would house a concert hall for 3000 people, the Council Chamber, departmental and public offices, and a reception room for 500-700 people. The winner of the competition was Joshua Charlesworth who had entered under the *nom de plume* 'Commonwealth'. It was noted by Mayor G.W. Aitken as being strongly drawn and a well organised design in the Classical Renaissance manner.²

The foundation stone was laid by the Duke of York, later King George V, on the 18th June 1901 in a grand ceremony. The foundation stone, "a polished piece of Victorian granite, of about three tons weight, contained in a receptacle specimens of the current coins of the realm, copies of the New Zealand Times and Evening Post, and a manuscript statement of the events leading up to the decision to erect a hall for the city".³ However, tenders for the construction were not called until a year later. The successful contractors were Paterson, Martin, and Hunter. Work began in 1902 and was completed by 1904, at a final cost in excess of £68,000. A separate contract for £7,000 for a pipe organ was let to Norman and Beard in London this was installed by J. Tustin, organ builder, in 1906.

The building was well received when it officially opened, bedecked with flags draped from cornices and pinnacles. On December 7th 1904 Mayor Aitken led a robed procession into the building where Elgar's 'Imperial March' and Mendelssohn's 'Hymn of Praise' were performed by the orchestra and large choir or the musical union, conducted by Robert Parker, before a crowd of 3000. The acoustics of the building were particularly commented upon, with the Wellington *Times* noting that

¹ William Toomath, 'Wellington Town Hall', *Newsletter of the Wellington Regional Committee of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust*, Volume 2, Number 2, September 1979, 4.

² Toomath, 'Wellington Town Hall', 4-5.

³ 'Wellington Town Hall: Yesterday's Ceremony', *Evening Post*, Volume LXI, Issue 143, 19 June 1901, Page 2.

'the experts and general public agreed in pronouncing the acoustic properties of the hall to be perfect', and that the Wellington Town Hall was 'superior to the more costly and ornate Sydney Town Hall where speakers generally have great difficulty in making themselves heard'. The *Times* also notes that the 'structure as a whole is a fine and imposing piece of architecture and is a credit to the city [...] a visible emblem of the importance and stability of Wellington'.⁴

Wellington's Town Hall was originally surmounted by a large tower which was intended to house a town clock and chimes, but it remained blank for nearly 20 years. In 1922 a clock was donated by John Blundell, the son of the founder of the *Evening Post*, and it was erected in 1923.⁵ Unfortunately, in the wake of the 1931 Hawkes Bay earthquake the whole tower was removed as a precaution and the clock was eventually re-housed in the Central Fire Station. The 1931 earthquake saw a seismic code of practice for structures introduced and the Town Hall received a comprehensive examination according to these rules. Substantial alterations were made to the exterior of the building including the removal of the tower and main entrance portico, all pediments, parapet balustrades and pinnacles, and alterations to the main cornice.⁶

In the 1942 Wairarapa earthquake the Town Hall suffered moderate damage particularly at upper levels including the parapets. Over the following two years a substantial system of bracing and strengthening by way of reinforced concrete buttresses and continuous network frames was installed. The work was designed by the city engineer and only the main hall and concert chamber were included. Further stripping of the architectural details was carried out at this time – the main Corinthian capitals and smaller Ionic capitals were removed and replaced with plain Tuscan type mouldings.⁷

In 1970 the interior of the building was repainted to a lively colour scheme designed by Grant Tilly based on the dominant colours in the original tiled floors of the foyers. In 1975 the exterior was repainted in a two colour system designed by Mayor Michael Fowler.⁸ The construction of the Michael Fowler Centre threatened the future of the Town Hall, but a case was argued by the NZHPT for its retention and in 1979 the Wellington City Council agreed to keep the building. However, by the late 1980s the Town Hall was again under threat of demolition and required substantial earthquake strengthening works.⁹ Fortunately the Town Hall was included in the plans for the new Civic Square project as the 'linchpin' that would integrate the old and the new.¹⁰

The restoration, re-strengthening, and development of the Town Hall was contracted to Mainzeal as main contractors, and to the Works Consultancy Services (previously the Department of Public Works, and now Opus) for architecture and heritage consultancy. The project reinstated a number of original features, and revealed the elaborate wrought iron balustrades that had been concealed under plasterwork on the main staircase. These balustrades were used as a template for new west-wing staircase. Other work in the entrance lobbies included the restoration of the original floor tiles which were uplifted, cleaned, and replaced.

⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁵ Wellington City Council, "101 Wakefield Street", *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory 2001: Non Residential Buildings*. (Wellington City Council, 2001), WAKE 1.

⁶ Toomath, 'Wellington Town Hall', 5-6.

⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁸ Toomath, 'Wellington Town Hall', 6.

⁹ Wellington City Council, "101 Wakefield Street".

¹⁰ 'A Town Hall for the 21st Century', compiled by Judy Siers for the Wellington City Council, 1992, 1.

The main auditorium was a major challenge and conservation included restoration of the dado, repair of the pressed zinc ceiling and balcony, replacement of the pediments over the doors, and repair of the plasterwork. The radiators were also refurbished and reinstated. New seating was selected, modern sprinkler and ventilation systems were installed, and the stage was modernised. The council chambers were restored and enlarged, with pressed metal ceilings recovered from other parts of the building were reused, as were the old concert chamber cast iron columns, and the balustrades were cast from mouldings made of the original stairwell to the old concert chamber. At the same time several new spaces were constructed including the Ilott Concert Chamber and the two west galleries. The building reopened in 1992.¹¹

In 2013 the building was used as the recording venue for the second 'Hobbit' movie. Sir Peter Jackson noted that "The very first music ever recorded for Howard Shore's magnificent score for The Lord of the Rings was done here, in Wellington, back in 2001 in the Town Hall. The piece, written for the Fellowship's journey into the Mines of Moria, was beautifully performed by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and showcased the exceptional acoustics of this over hundred-year-old building."¹² The building closed soon-after for earthquake strengthening.

The strengthening works are somewhat controversial, and include the base isolation of the building, and an improvement in the structure of the building to 140% of the new building standards (NBS). The project is currently on-hold, and the Dominion Post recently reported that "Investigations into the 110-year-old building's foundations have resulted in the cost soaring from \$43.7m to somewhere in the region of \$60m - prompting one councillor to suggest abandoning it in favour of a new building."¹³ The 50 tonne 1906 organ has been dismantled and is currently in storage.

1.2 Timeline of modifications – Major modifications outlined here, for Wellington City Archives Permit information see appendix at end of document.

1902-04	Original Construction
1906	Organ installed
1923	Clock installed in tower
1934	Tower and other exterior features removed from hall
1937	Town Hall re-roofed
1943-45	Further external features removed and seismic strengthening carried out
1943	Ventilation system installed to concert chamber
1948	Extension to reception room on first floor constructed
1991-92	Building refurbished and strengthened. Concert chamber demolished and replaced by conference/reception rooms, Ilott Concert Chamber constructed.

1.3 Occupation history

Wellington City Council

¹¹ Ibid, 13-15, 20-21.

¹² 'Soundtrack for second Hobbit film to be recorded by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra at Wellington Town Hall' New Zealand Symphony Orchestra press release 12 July 2013 <http://www.nzso.co.nz/news/post/2013/07/soundtrack-second-hobbit-film-recorded-new-zealand-symphony-orchestra-wellington-town-hall/>

¹³ Dave Burgess, 'Wellington's \$60 million question', *The Dominion Post*, 14/02/2014

1.4 Architect

Charlesworth, Joshua (1861 – 1925)

Charlesworth (1861-1925) was born in Yorkshire and the first record of his practice in Wellington was in the New Zealand Post Office Directory of 1885-87. He won a competition for the design of the Home for the Aged and Needy in June, 1887, and in the same year won another for the design of the Nelson Town Hall. Charlesworth set up practice in Wellington in his early twenties, designing many institutional buildings and showing command of the Revivalist styles of architecture. His work includes the Wellington Town Hall (1901), Brancepeth Station Homestead addition, Wairarapa (1905), Te Aro Post Office (1908), St Hilda's Church, Upper Hutt (1909), and seventeen branch banks for the Bank of New Zealand, situated throughout the country (1907-17). Charlesworth was elected a Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architects in 1905, and became a life member of the Institute. He was its vice-president in 1909-10, and was the first chairman of a society of architects which was formed in 1912. Charlesworth also belonged to the Yorkshire Society in Wellington and was its president for many years.¹⁴

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 1902 – 1904. | Wellington Town Hall, 101 Wakefield Street, WELLINGTON (NZHPT Category I – 3275, WCC Map 17 ref 325) |
| 1903 | new building at 'Homewood', 50 Homewood Avenue, Karori, (NZHPT Category I - 1368) |
| 1914 | The Farmers Building, 94 – 102 Cuba Street. (NZHPT Category II – 3632, WCC Map 16 reference 77/1) |

Non-Wellington City NZHPT Category I listed buildings by Charlesworth include: -

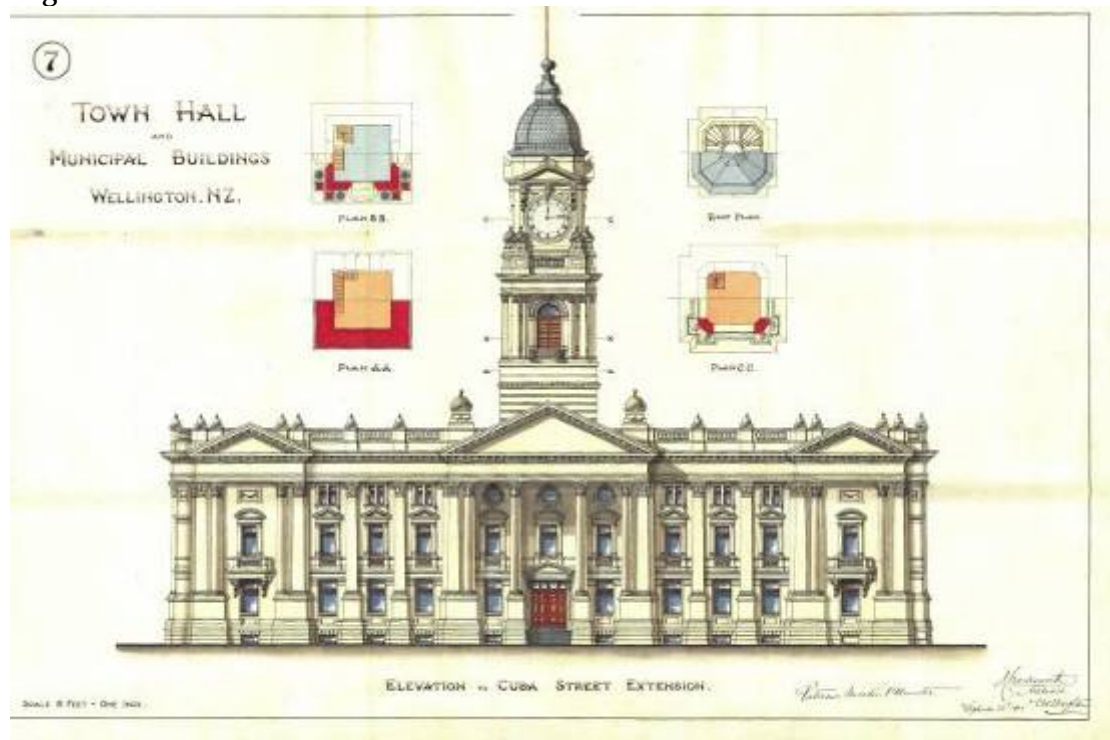
- | | |
|------|---|
| 1905 | Brancepeth Station Homestead, Wainuiora |
| 1906 | 'Domus' 22 Patrick Street, Petone. House - Workers' Dwelling Act 1905 |
| 1914 | BNZ Takaka |
| 1915 | BNZ Dannevirke |

¹⁴Historic Places Trust, 'Joshua Charlesworth – Architect', *NZHPT Professional biographies*, accessed 17/06/2013, <http://www.historic.org.nz/corporate/registersearch/ProfessionalBio/Professional.aspx?ID=42>

2.0 Physical description

2.1 Architecture

Original Plans – WCA 000248: 12: : 7



Joshua Charlesworth's winning design for the Wellington Town Hall was a moderately exuberant Classical composition with Edwardian flourishes, complete with a very tall and prominent clock tower and elegant vertical proportions. The principal entrance was from Wakefield Street, sheltered under a massive Corinthian portico beneath the clock tower. Built of rendered masonry with a corrugated iron roof behind the parapets and timber joinery, the carefully composed neo-Classical exterior, designed much in the manner of contemporary English civic buildings, was complemented with rich decoration and high quality finishes on the interior as befitted a first-class civic facility.¹⁵

In 1934 the clock tower and most of the high level decoration on the building was taken down as a precaution, following the experiences of the Napier earthquake. Further earthquake-risk amelioration measures were carried out in 1942.

A refurbishment programme completed in 1992 strengthened and altered the building, with the loss of the former Concert Chamber, Wellington's finest men's toilets, the use of the original main entrance and various other important original features. The main hall, organ, and eastern stair are the principal remaining heritage elements of the interior.

The close proximity of the MFC to what is now the main entrance is to the detriment of the townscape values of both buildings. Due to the elevated ground level in the square, the strong basalt base of the north façade is barely seen and the building consequently has a somewhat uneasy relationship with the ground on this side.¹⁶

¹⁵ Michael Kelly et al, 'Civic Centre Heritage Area' WCC unpublished heritage report for DPC 48, 2006

¹⁶ Paraphrased from: Boffa Miskell Limited and Cochran, C, 1999, *Wellington Heritage Building Inventory*, Wellington, CD edition, WAKE1

Nevertheless, this is the most important building on the square and is held in high public esteem. Both the care taken with the design and the civic importance of the building is strongly evident in its elegant proportions, patterns of window openings and mouldings and enrichments and the aspirations and pride of the city that built it are manifest in the carefully restrained exuberance of the design. This building makes a significant positive contribution to the qualities of the area.

The interior of the building is somewhat better preserved, and more complete, than the exterior. The main hall and entranceway are well designed and characteristic of their times. The entry to the main auditorium is between two branches of the elegant bifurcated stair. Ceilings are 'Wunderlich' stamped zinc throughout and are found in a variety of patterns. The intricately tiled floors of the main entrance foyer and passageway were repaired in the 1991/2 renovation and remain a *tour de force* making an immediate festive impression. The tiles are patterned in black, white, soft blue, and ochre and are a splendid example of Victorian encaustic tile work.

The internal spaces were originally arranged in a simple rectangular shape, but in the 1991/2 refurbishment the plan changes blocked off the original south corridor opposite the north corridor to allow for the new concert chamber. A new corridor was formed skirting the outside south eastern wall of the auditorium which meets up with the original south corridor, stair and 'vestibule'. The new concert chamber was formed at the ground floor level from the original corridor, building inspectors' and city engineers offices on the south east corner of the building.

The main hall is twice as long as it is wide, and its height three fifths its width. The organ stands in a 12 foot recess above the stage. The acoustics of the main hall are well recognised. The Toomath report (referenced in history) contains a section by R. J. Satory, an acoustic physicist, which states that the hall is among the ten best in the world for 'Romantic' music. The issue of damage to the acoustics of the building was a major issue in the 1991/2 refurbishment – fortunately this did not turn out to be the case. Satory noted that the original concert chamber was less than ideal, the space is currently arranged as the Mayoral chambers on the first floor and a seminar suite on the upper floor – although as of 2014 the mayor is housed in temporary chambers.

2.2 Materials

The construction is primarily load bearing brick masonry laid in cement mortar. The brickwork is not revealed as such but has been plastered, stucco adorned, and lined to simulate a stone building. Columns, cornices, and other embellishments were moulded in concrete. Externally a plinth is formed with deeply rusticated rock-faced blocks of Malmesbury blue stone from Melbourne (painted). The entire exterior surface was coated in grey cement plaster. The solid brick walls stand on concrete strip foundations carried on concrete piles.

The roof trusses across the major spaces are 'engineered' queen-post types, made out of massive Oregon timbers joined by steel plates. The floors, framing, and roof framing are all in timber. The roof was originally corrugated galvanised iron; it was replaced in the 1930s similar materials and painted with bitumastic paint prior to being laid.

Internally many ceilings are pressed metal ceiling tiles, flooring to the main entrance are of encaustic geometric floor tiles, while the main stair has a cast iron balustrade.

2.3 Setting

The Town Hall is set at the periphery of the Civic Square between the Brutalist Michael Fowler Centre (1983), and the Old Administration Building (Municipal Office Building – MOB, 1951).

The Civic Centre Heritage Area is a large city block bounded by streets on all sides – Jervois Quay, Harris, Victoria and Wakefield Streets. The proposed heritage area contains a significant open public space that is bordered by the principal buildings. There are two buildings of high heritage value, one older building of heritage significance and two modern buildings that contribute to the character and quality of the open space and the Michael Fowler Centre.¹⁷

The square itself is a particularly special public space in Wellington, formed for civic purposes by the closure of Mercer Street and the construction of an elevated outdoor piazza at the floor level of the former public library and the Town Hall. The square is framed and defined by the surrounding collection of civic buildings. The public use of the square reinforces the importance of the building collection and the buildings in turn emphasise the public role and form of the open space.

Sources

Burgess, Dave. 'Wellington's \$60 million question', *The Dominion Post*, 14/02/2014
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Wellington City Council. 'A Town Hall from the 21st Century'. Compiled by Judy Siers for the Wellington City Council, 1992.

¹⁷ Michael Kelly et al, 'Civic Centre Heritage Area' WCC unpublished heritage report for DPC 48, 2006

Wellington City Archives

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-Permit List (See Appendix).

Criteria for assessing cultural heritage significance

Cultural heritage values

Aesthetic Value:

Architectural: *Does the item have architectural or artistic value for characteristics that may include its design, style, era, form, scale, materials, colour, texture, patina of age, quality of space, craftsmanship, smells, and sounds?*

The Wellington Town Hall is arguably the greatest design by Joshua Charlesworth, one of the pre-eminent Wellington architects around the turn of the last century. The exterior has been modified as a response to both the 1931 Hawkes Bay and 1942 Wellington/Wairarapa earthquakes and the clock-tower, and much of the external ornament has been removed. The building is notable for its fine interiors, particularly the entrance, halls, stairways and auditorium. The concert chamber has international recognition for its fine acoustic qualities – particularly for orchestral music.

Townscape: *Does the item have townscape value for the part it plays in defining a space or street; providing visual interest; its role as a landmark; or the contribution it makes to the character and sense of place of Wellington?*

The Wellington Town Hall is a landmark building that defines part of the southern boundary of Wellington's Civic Square. The square is the pre-eminent public space in central Wellington, and is widely used by Wellingtonians and visitors alike.

Group: *Is the item part of a group of buildings, structures, or sites that taken together have coherence because of their age, history, style, scale, materials, or use?*

The Town Hall contributes to the Civic Centre Heritage Area. Although it is relatively newly established and contains a number of buildings and features of recent vintage, the area contains and is defined by a collection of important civic buildings, two of which have very high heritage values.

Historic Value:

Association: *Is the item associated with an important person, group, or organisation?*

The Wellington Town Hall has been associated with a number of important people and organisations over the past century. It was built in the term of office of mayor John Guthrie Wood Aitken (1841-1921), during a period of development that included the construction of the Te Aro Baths and installation of the electric tram network. The foundation stone was laid by The Duke of Cornwall and York, later to become King George V, and the building was the most significant work of architect Joshua Charlesworth.

Association: *Is the item associated with an important historic event, theme, pattern, phase, or activity?*

The Town hall, with its concert hall, concert chamber and reception room, council chambers and municipal offices, have been a central to the governance and cultural life of Wellington for over 100 years.

Scientific Value:

Archaeological: *Does the item have archaeological value for its ability to provide scientific information about past human activity?*

Although the building was constructed post 1900, it is situated in the NZAA Central City Archaeological Area R27/270 and sited on reclaimed land R27/456. There is significant potential for archaeological material to be present.

Educational: *Does the item have educational value for what it can demonstrate about aspects of the past?*

There is educational value in the design of the Town Hall as it was originally designed with the basement below the water table. The need to prevent water ingress was an element of the design. The Town Hall can also provide insight into the history of Wellington architecture, the design of Australasian Town Halls in the early 20th Century, and the history of the Wellington City Council.

Technological: *Does the item have technological value for its innovative or important construction methods or use of materials?*

The building has technological value for the high quality of its design, materials and craftsmanship. Materials of particular note are the Malmsbury Bluestone on the exterior, the Wunderlich pressed metal ceiling tiles, the encaustic floor tiles, the cast iron balustrading, and the fine carved timber posts to the stairs.

Social Value:

Public esteem: *Is the item held in high public esteem?*

The building is likely to be held in high public esteem as a popular venue and performance space, and for the versatile auditorium that has international recognition for its fine acoustics. It has maintained its original use values and is still one of the principle venues for civic and public functions, concerts, and other events and as the home of local government.

Symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual: *Does the item have symbolic, commemorative, traditional, spiritual or other cultural value for the community who has used and continues to use it?*

The Town Hall has commemorative value as it houses a number of plaques recognising officers of the Council and others who have contributed to the city and to the building.

Identity/Sense of place/Continuity:

*Is the item a focus of community, regional, or national identity?
Does the item contribute to sense of place or continuity?*

The Wellington Town Hall, as a performance venue, contributes to Wellington's self-proclaimed identity as New Zealand's 'cultural capital'. It is the symbolic and physical centre of local government, and houses the Mayoral Offices.

Sentiment/Connection: *Is the item a focus of community sentiment and connection?*

The building is likely to be a focus of community sentiment and connection as a popular venue that has hosted everything from school/community festivals, to orchestral and chamber music concerts, to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. As such, a wide cross section of the community have attended events at the venue and are likely to have a strong connection to this place.

Level of cultural heritage significance

Rare: *Is the item rare, unique, unusual, seminal, influential, or outstanding?*

The Wellington Town Hall has rarity due to the quality of the acoustics in the main auditorium.

Representative: *Is the item a good example of the class it represents?*

The Wellington Town Hall is a representative of civic building design of the time in New Zealand and Australia in terms of style, scale, form, and function. The construction and materials are representative of the technologies available in the period but are of a particularly high quality.

Authentic: *Does the item have authenticity or integrity because it retains significant fabric from the time of its construction or from later periods when important additions or modifications were carried out?*

Although there have been some major alterations made to the interior including:

- demolition of original concert chamber and replacement with the Mayoral suite; reconfiguration of the ground floor to allow for new concert chamber; demolition of western additions and its replacement with a two level ambulatory;

And to the exterior including:

- removal of tower and modifications to the main portico; removal of pediments, parapet balustrades and pinnacles; adaptations to the main cornice; re-roofing; removal of embellishments such as Corinthian capitals and smaller Ionic capitals and their replacement with Tuscan capitals;

There remains much of the original building structure and fabric of the major spaces and elevations.

The refurbishment work of 1991/92 saw the restoration of a number of spaces, the repair of original features such as the main foyer floor tiles and cast iron balustrades contributing greatly to a sense of integrity in the building.

Local/Regional/National/International

Is the item important for any of the above characteristics at a local, regional, national, or international level?

The Wellington Town Hall is a nationally significant building. It has maintained its original use values and is still one of the principle venues for civic and public functions, concerts, and other events and as the home of local government.

3.0 Appendix

Research checklist (desktop)

Source	Y/N	Comments
1995 Heritage Inventory		
2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
WCC Records – building file		
WCC Records – grant files (earthquake strengthening, enhancement of heritage values)		
Research notes from 2001 Non-Residential heritage Inventory		
Plan change?		
Heritage Area Report		
Heritage Area Spreadsheet		
Heritage items folder (electronic)		
HPT website		
HPT files		
Conservation Plan		
Searched Heritage Library (CAB 2)		

