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PARLIAMENT PRECINCT: OLD ASSEMBLY BUILDING
PERMIT APPLICATION : CONSTRUCTION OF TEMPORARY ROOF : 2ND FLOOR,
OLD ASSEMBLY BUILDING
BUILT ENVIRONMENT UNIT
DATE: 14 – 04 – 2022



Old Assembly Building : Assembly Chamber



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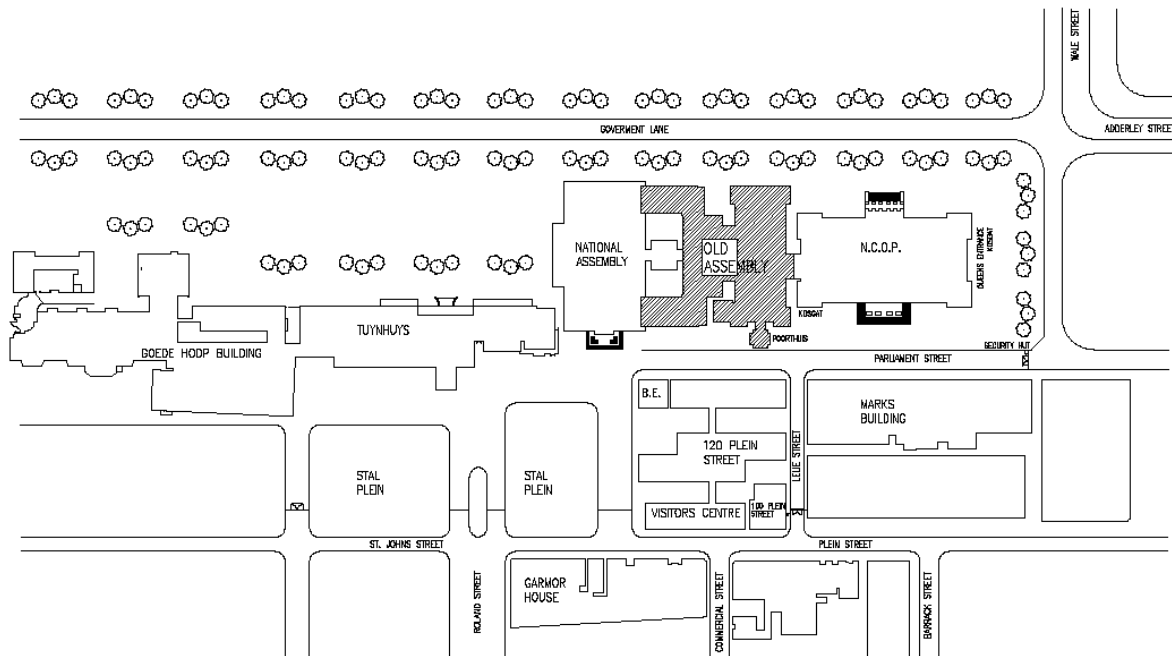
1. Introduction : Reason for the submission

The aim of this submission is to apply for and obtain an urgent Permit from SAHRA for the construction of a Temporary roof over the 2nd floor of Old Assembly that was destroyed by fire. The installation of the temporary roof would also assist in stabilizing the two gable walls that was identified. The urgent assistance of SAHRA is required in this regard.

2. The Site description

Old Assembly Address : Located between Parliament Street and Government Avenue on the Parliamentary Precinct, Cape Town.

The Old Assembly occupies an important position in the architectural progression along Government Avenue and Parliament street going towards Tuynhuys. It is situated between the National Assembly (NA) and the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) buildings. Later extensions to the Old Assembly includes an office wing on the South West and a Security Lobby (which also acts as the Main Entrance), both facing towards Parliament street.





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The building is subject to Section 34(1) of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), Act 25 of 1999 which controls alterations and demolitions to any buildings older than 60 years. The Houses of Parliament of which the Old Assembly forms part of, received Grade 1 National Heritage Status from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). In turn, these buildings forms part of the greater Grade 1 National Heritage Site, eg. the entire Parliamentary Precinct, and of which the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) is the custodian of.

3. Statement of Significance

The Old Assembly is where the House of Assembly met until 1988. The sittings was then moved over to the National Assembly building. The large Assembly Chamber occupies a focal and significant place in the Old Assembly building.

Overall, the Old Assembly has historical significance. The following are extracts from the Cape Town : Parliamentary Precinct Conservation and Integrated Management Plan – April 2007 WCS 042965, a project that was implemented by DPWI.

“The Old Assembly is an important part of a group of significant buildings in the precinct between the NCOP and New National Assembly building.”

In terms of the National Heritage Resources Act definitions, the Old Assembly building is of cultural heritage significance in terms of :

- *Great regional aesthetic and architectural significance in terms of. being a fine architectural example of its period displaying good craftsmanship and fine surviving interiors; its probable association with a pioneering and prominent Architect of the period i.e. Herbert Baker; as well as being a significant element within a larger architectural group of recognized significance within the parliamentary precinct.*
- *Great national historical significance relating to it's key role in the governance of the country and associations with prominent events in local and international history over a period of one century. These include the first session of parliament of the Union of South Africa, declaration of the country's participation in both*



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World Wars, legislation associated with the rise of apartheid and repression of anti-apartheid activism, Harold Macmillan's historic "Winds of Change" speech and the assassination of Hendrik Verwoerd.

- *Great national social significance relating to its symbolic role as a legislative seat of power in the Union of South Africa and subsequently creating the legislative framework for the creation of the apartheid state.*
- *Some national linguistic, scientific and spiritual significance associated with influential legislation passed in these field on the this site."*

4. The Building

The Old Assembly building was constructed as an extension to the Old Parliament building in 1910 to accommodate the Union Parliament. It was designed by the Public Works Department with active assistance from Herbert Baker and constructed by AB Reid and Company.

The building is described as being "*a manifestation of a more robust neo-classicism*" a theme which was popular in the 20th Century. The architectural features was/is well proportioned. The interior depicts influences of Baker and Masey.

The interior is organized around two spaces which remained largely intact : The Entrance Hall/NCOP link corridor and the Assembly Chamber. These spaces are regarded as architecturally, aesthetically and historically significant and whose features should be retained.

The building underwent two extensions since 1910. The largest was completed in 1960 and resulted in the South West wing which was brought about due to the demand for more office space. A much smaller extension was added in 1988, entailing the security lobby.

The Old Assembly facades, in particular the façade facing Parliament street and to a lesser extent the façade facing Government avenue, are regarded as fine architectural period pieces to be conserved. These includes the building's profile and roofscape, boundary railings and piers. All these elements forms an integral part of the architectural composition of the building. The building's facades are well proportioned in terms of symmetry and order that gives off a strong, robust and stately appearance. These features follows the theme and continuation of the NCOP building. The walls are red facebrick, broken up with white detailed plastered features like the columns with elaborate detailed plaster work, detailed corbelled and moulded balconies, plastered window and door surrounds/mouldings, plastered string courses, cornices etc.



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Any alterations and additions to the main facades should be avoided, unless it entails approved conservation works. The 1960 South West extension is not seen as being as significant as the rest of the building, but it still contributes to the overall massing, proportions, articulation and consistency of finishes that can be found throughout the parliamentary precinct.



Front façade facing Parliament street (2020) : View of the 2nd floor before the fire, showing the detailed plastered features.



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Locality plan : Parliament Precinct – Indication of the prominent facades

5. Background : The reason for the submission

On the morning of the 02nd January 2022, a major fire devastated South Africa's Parliament. The fire rendered the National Assembly (where Members of Parliament sit for debates) as well as the Old Assembly unusable.

The fire appears to have started on the South East side, 02nd floor of the Old Assembly building. The National Assembly building was also severely affected by the fire. Investigations are still underway to establish the cause and origin of the fire.

An internal Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) Professional Engineering Services team conducted a preliminary visual assessment of the damages, including assessing the safety aspect of the site immediately after the fires were put out. Their findings, resulting from this preliminary visual assessment, recommended that both the National Assembly and Old



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Assembly buildings had to be cordoned off and access restricted, until independent specialist engineering consultants could be appointed to conduct further detailed assessments and conducting tests to establish the strength of the existing material.

Acting on the recommendations from DPWI Engineering Services, DPWI went through an expedited appointment process (a deviation from the National Treasury regulations which is allowed in emergencies or exceptional circumstances) to appoint an Implementing Agent, COEGA Development Corporation (CDC) on the 11th February 2022, who in turned appointed independent Service Providers (specialists engineering as well as health and safety consultants) to commence with Phase 1 of the Assessment process which was as follows :

1. Providing DPWI with a damage report indicating the extent of the structural damages including any other structural issues.
2. Pronouncement on the safety aspect of the structure.
3. Advising on short term safety measures.

The above was initiated not only to give DPWI an indication of the damages, but also to pronounce the building safe in order for the Hawks and Fire Forensic Investigations to conduct their investigations on the cause/s of the fires.

6. Extend of the fire damages at the Old Assembly building

The Phase 1 assessment highlighted the following damages :

1. The complete destruction of the 2nd floor in the South East part of the building, affecting the prominent façade facing onto Parliament street.
2. Falling debris (in the form of fire damaged material) falling done onto the lower levels (mainly unaffected by the fire), particularly Old Assembly Chamber and the inner Courtyard.
3. Damages caused by the water used by the Fire Department to put out the fires.

Note : This report will mainly focus on the actual fire damages on the second floor and subsequent recommendations.

2nd Floor, South East : Old Assembly

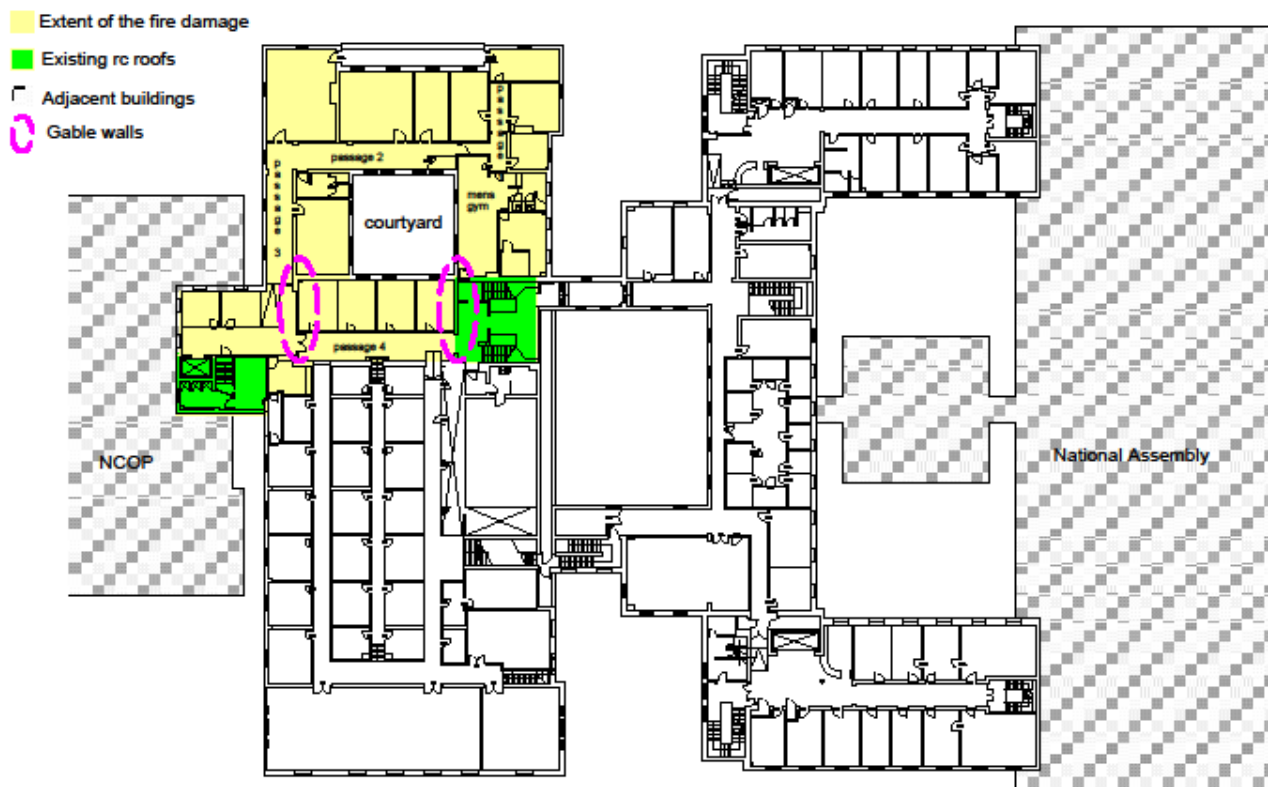
The floor have been completely gutted by the fire. The only remaining structures are the existing brick walls and concrete beams/lintels.

1. The existing roofs, which consisted of structural timber trusses and rafters, have been completely destroyed. A few burned remains of the trusses is still evident.



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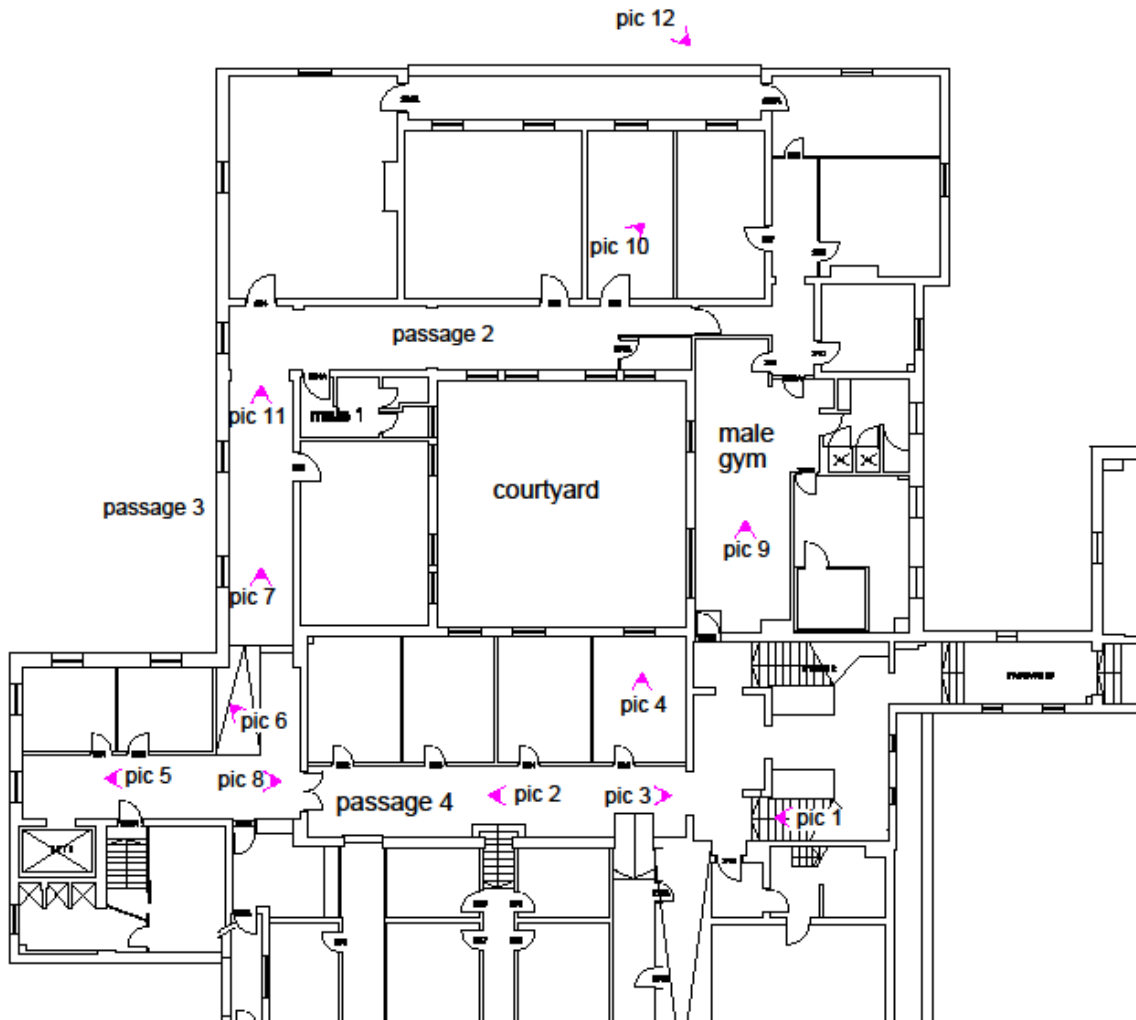
2. The brickwalls, which includes the perimeter parapet walls, two gable walls and intermediate brick walls, are still intact. Cracks have appeared on the façade walls which requires repair and which will have to be dealt with before the temporary roof is installed.
3. The existing timber framed windows have been completely destroyed (burned-out).
4. Part of the suspended timber floor (in the most South Eastern corner of the building) have collapsed. The surviving timber floor has to be tread on carefully.



2nd Floor layout, Old Assembly building – Extent of the fire damage



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Photographic footprint



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Picture 1 : RC roof over stairs. View from Staircase towards the entrance to the 2nd floor



Picture 2 : View down Passage 4



Picture 3 : View towards gable roof



Picture 4 : View in one of the Offices – burned windows



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Picture 5



Picture 6 : Parapet wall – crack in wall



Picture 7 : View down Passage 3



Picture 8 : Close-up of gable wall



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Picture 9 : Men Gymnasium



Picture 10 :



Picture 11 : Collapse of timber floor



Picture 12 : External view of facade



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7. Recommendations from the appointment Service Providers

The initial findings produced by the appointed Service Provider confirmed that the structural damages brought about by the fire, does not pose a risk to the buildings collapsing.

The Phase 1 assessment report compiled made the following recommendations (Note : The report is not available for public viewing. Only specific DPWI executive officials was made party to that report for the sake of confidentiality.)

1. Making safe the walls, particularly the 2 gable walls by bracing them to avoid the possibility of them falling over.
2. Provide a temporary roof cover over the whole area to avoid further water damage to the lower floors which was largely unaffected by the fire.

8. Temporary roof

Based on the above recommendations, DPWI tasked internal Professional Services Structural Engineers and Quantity Surveyor with inputs from the Architect to investigate and compile proposals suitable for temporary roof coverings. Due to the urgent nature of this project (to be done before the onslaught of winter), the scope of works and estimate is high level (at this stage) to get approval and thus allowing DPWI to register the project and procure the funds for execution. Once that has been done, a specialist roofing contracting company will be procured to provide a design and supply service.

There are certain requirements that had to be kept in mind for the temporary roof :

1. The roof covering has to be lightweight and not exert additional and unnecessary weight upon the existing walls.
2. It could act as a bracing element to brace the gable walls as well as the perimeter walls.
3. It has to be cost effective to remain preferably under the R1 million threshold in order for DPWI to execute the project under their 'emergency budget' account.
4. The roof has to be durable and be able to be of service for approximately 3 years. This is the time envisioned for the commencement of the complete restorative construction process.

The various proposals compiled by the DPWI Structural Engineer, indicated various advantages and disadvantages. Through that exercise, a lightweight roof construction consisting of the following appears to be the best option :



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1. Mono-pitch roof with corrugated sheeting at 7.5 degree slope over timber rafters support and sloping towards the courtyard. The roof will start at +/- 700mm below the parapet and slope towards the inner Courtyard where the water will discharge into rainwater goods.
2. The roof sheeting can be a combination of galvanized/colour coded and translucent sheeting to allow for the filtration of natural light.
3. Appropriate flashing along the perimeter wall etc
4. Closing up the window openings with a material that can be painted (eg shutterboard etc) to match the existing wall.

For more detailed information, please refer to the attached Structural report.

9. Conclusion

DPWI have just appointed COEGA Development Corporation (CDC) to commence with Phase 2 of the Detailed Assessment process. For this process, a full team of external and independent Professional Consultants have been appointed to compile a detailed report with the intention of paving the way for the comprehensive restoration process to the Old Assembly and National Assembly buildings. The team consist of :

Heritage Architect

Architects

Engineers (Structural, Civil, Mechanical, Electrical and Fire)

Health and Safety

Quantity Surveyors

10. Sources

1. *CT Parliamentary Precinct Conservation and Integration Management Plan, WCS 042965, April 2007).*
2. *Cape Town Parliament : Fire Damage to New Assembly and Old Assembly – 29th March 2022. DPWI*
3. *“South Africa’s Parliament fire : How it affects a break from the past.” BBC News by Pumza Fihlani.*