

ACT LAW COURTS



FACT SHEET

HISTORY OF THE LAW COURTS BUILDING

The Law Courts Building was opened by Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies in 1963. The building was located on a site which had been identified for municipal court buildings from the earliest versions of the Griffin Plan. The building was designed by Yuncken, Freeman Brothers, Griffith and Simpson, a renowned architectural firm who had recently completed a number of other projects in the Civic area.

WHY ARE WE REPLACING

While the Law Courts Building is a classic example of late 20th Century Stripped Classical Style, there are a number of failings which need to be rectified in order to deliver justice effectively in the 21st century. These include:

- insufficient size and number of courtrooms;

At opening the building housed six courtrooms which serviced the Court of Petty Sessions (Magistrates Court) and Supreme Court and was designed to service a population of up to 100,000 people.

The population of Canberra has grown to around 350,000 and even the intervening construction of a separate Magistrates Court building in 1996 has not alleviated the need to expand and modernise the court facilities.

- insufficient jury facilities;
- inability to update courtroom technology;
- outdated building fabric, plant and equipment; and
- inability to adapt to modern security and custodial requirements inside the building envelope.



ACT Law Court interior courtroom - 1965

WHAT ARE WE GETTING

The new facility will be a combined building, joining the refurbished heritage building with the existing Magistrates Court via a four storey link building adjacent to Vernon Circle. The facility will meet the needs of the Territory today with the capacity to easily expand and reconfigure to meet requirements for additional courtrooms for the next 50 years. Key features of the facility include:

- 18 courtrooms (with capacity to expand to 22 courtrooms) – 8 being new build, 5 having jury capability and all having modern courtroom technology installed;
- separate access and travel routes for Judiciary, Jury, Custodial and public;
- a dedicated witness zone with video evidence suites and family waiting areas;
- enhanced facilities for community and justice support organisations; and
- energy efficient building with a photovoltaic array capable of providing base-load power for the entire facility.



Artist impression of ACT Law Court , University Avenue



Artist impression of interior view

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE HERITAGE BUILDING

Respect for the heritage of the Law Courts Building was a key criteria in the assessment of designs. The key heritage fabric of the building including the façade, the atrium, the podium and external peri-style columns will all be retained in the new facility. The gifted timber adorning

the six courtrooms in the current facility will also be re-used and interpreted in the new facility.

The Law Courts Building recently celebrated its 50th birthday. With the new facility designed to service Canberra for the next 50 years, in 50 years' time, when people reflect on the 100th anniversary of this building they will be able to appreciate that the heritage of the original building has been respected in the new.



ACT Law Court external view - 1963