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International working party for  
**documentation and conservation**

of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the  
**modern movement**

**New International Selection**  
**Full Documentation Fiche 2003**

**for office use only**

**composed by national/regional working party of: New Zealand**

0. Picture of building/ group of buildings/ urban scheme/ landscape/ garden



depicted item: Civic Building (also known as the Auckland City Administration Building)  
source: Photograph by Lauren Speer  
date: 20 November 2013

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ISC/R members update 2003

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## 1. Identity of building/ group of buildings/ group of buildings/ landscape/ garden

### 1.1 Data for identification

current name: Civic Building

former/original/variant name: Auckland City Council Administration Building

number and name of street: 1 Greys Avenue

town: Auckland

province/state: Auckland

post code: 1010

lot: Lot 3 DP 86062

country: New Zealand

national topographical grid reference: n/a

current typology: Public / local authority offices

former/original/variant typology: As above

comments on typology: The building was purpose-built to house Auckland City Council staff and the city's mayor. It continues to house council staff, albeit under the name Auckland Council.

### 1.2 Status of protection

protected by: The building is not scheduled by Auckland Council. It is, however, included on the council's Cultural Heritage Inventory and is described there as 'Historic Building' and 'Historic Structure'.<sup>1</sup> It is proposed for listing as Category B on the forthcoming Unitary Plan.

grade: Unlisted

date: Cultural Heritage Inventory is dated 7 November 2012

valid for: Whole building

remarks: CHI Number: 19838 Date Reported: 7 November 2012 Reported by: AC Heritage Researcher

### 1.3 Visually or functionally related building(s)/site(s)

name(s) of surrounding area/building(s): Auckland Town Hall (1911), Bledisloe State Building (1965), Aotea Square Carpark (1976, now called the Civic Carpark), Aotea Square (1979), Aotea Centre (1990) and Metro Centre (1999).

visual relations: The Civic Building is an elegant nineteen-storey high-rise building. It was the tallest building in the Auckland CBD at the time of its design, and was designed to be a landmark for the central business district of Auckland.<sup>2</sup> It has a narrow footprint, with its main entry on the east façade, looking across Aotea Square to the Auckland Town Hall, and its narrow north elevation facing towards the Aotea Centre and, in turn, Bledisloe State Building. Collectively, these buildings frame Aotea Square, as was proposed in the fourth Civic Centre scheme of 1951.<sup>3</sup> This framing of the square is completed by the Metro Centre (an entertainment precinct) on the north edge, fronting onto Queen Street.

functional relations: The Civic Building was envisaged in the fourth Civic Centre scheme (1951) to house all of the administrative staff and functions of the Auckland City Council. It

<sup>1</sup> Auckland Council, 'Auckland Council: Cultural Heritage Inventory'. Accessed November 19, 2013. <https://chi.net.nz/CHIPlacesPublic.aspx?id=74316>

<sup>2</sup> S. W. Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', *New Zealand Institute of Architects Journal*, March 1968, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Skinner, 'T. K. Donner: The Architect', BArch thesis, The University of Auckland, 1994, p. 55.

enjoys proximity to, and therefore a pragmatic relationship with, the Auckland Town Hall (within which the current council chambers are located), the Bledisloe State Building (originally accommodating the Ministry of Works but currently one of the offices of Auckland Transport) and the Aotea Centre (the largest performing arts centre of its kind in New Zealand, comprising the ASB Auditorium, the Herald Theatre and seminar/meeting facilities). Aotea Square is a piazza that links together all these civic buildings to create a Civic Centre for the Auckland region. Vehicular access to these buildings and facilities is provided by the large underground carpark beneath the square.

Due to the Auckland region's substantial population growth in recent years, territorial authorities within it were amalgamated in 2010 to form the large unitary authority of the Auckland Council. This has resulted in the need for, and the provision of, additional civic administration facilities both within and beyond Aotea Square, thus dispersing council staff to other areas in central Auckland and the greater Auckland region.

## 2. History of building

### 2.1 Chronology

commission or competition date: The agreement for the Auckland Civic Centre was signed between the Auckland City Council and the Government on 20 April 1950. However, discussions about a Civic Centre had begun as early as 1911 when the Auckland Town Hall was completed.<sup>4</sup>

design period(s): Preliminary sketch plans: 1951 – 1954  
Final design and working drawings: September 1954 – January 1960

start of site work: Construction contract signed: 17 January 1964  
Preparatory excavation commenced: February 1964  
Building construction: March 1964 – 1966

completion/inauguration: The building was opened by His Excellency the Governor General Sir Bernard Fergusson on 28 October 1966.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2 Summary of development

commission brief: Discussion about the creation of an Auckland Civic Centre began with the development of the Town Hall in 1911. Some 50 years later, the Civic Centre Advisory Committee designed and developed four potential Civic Centre schemes. The committee comprised the Commissioner of Works; the Government Architect (thought to have been Robert Patterson, before his retirement in 1952 and his replacement by Gordon Wilson); the council's Director of Works, A. J. Dickson; the council's chief architect, Tibor K. Donner; and other consultant architects.<sup>6</sup> The first three Civic Centre design schemes included long, slab buildings bordering a civic square. Notably, the Baroque Revival Town Hall was excluded from these three Civic Centre designs. An ambitious skyscraper, designed to house Auckland City Council staff, was added to the fourth Civic Centre scheme (it became known as Scheme 4) on 'grounds of prestige and symbolism'.<sup>7</sup> The Civic Building was to symbolise a progressive Auckland City Council and indeed a progressive city, at that time New Zealand's fastest growing. Other elements of this scheme included council chambers, central government offices and an auditorium, all of which were built and are present in today's Civic Centre.

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<sup>4</sup> Skinner, 'T. K. Donner', p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', *Home and Building*, November 1966, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', p. 81.

design brief: The building design took its lead from the original (1951) Scheme 4 sketch, with minimal change. Council approved the proposed development in 1954, and then requested sketch plans.<sup>8</sup> Donner opted for a steel frame to ensure a light structure appropriate to the building's tall, slim proportions (concrete construction would have meant a 'more massive structure' and proportions both less tall and less narrow).<sup>9</sup> Steel framing was unusual in mid-1950s New Zealand and thus Donner, with engineer Vern Coleman, embarked on a fact-finding world tour in 1956. They attended the first World Conference on Earthquake Engineering in San Francisco and visited contemporary high-rise buildings in North America, Europe and Australia. At the conference, they met the Californian engineer, John A. Blume, who greatly influenced the Civic Building's construction by encouraging a structural system that utilised steel columns and beams fastened with high tensile bolts rather than requiring internal shear walls for diagonal bracing.<sup>10</sup>

building/construction: Preliminary cost estimates for the building's construction were calculated in August 1954 at £1,350,000. The council applied to the Local Government Loans Board for consent to raise the necessary funds to build the building. However, this funding was deferred until 1963. Structural development and a tendering process continued during this nine-year period. The construction contract was signed on 17 January 1964; preparatory excavation began in February; and the construction of the building in March.<sup>11</sup> All the steel was imported from Australia, and Polynesian migrant workers were amongst those who were trained to undertake the welding.<sup>12</sup> With the prefabricated components, the building rose at the astonishing rate of almost one floor per week.<sup>13</sup>

completed situation: The council's move into the newly completed Civic Building in 1966 marked the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Auckland's city status. A 1968 article in the *New Zealand Institute of Architects Journal* recognised the building as 'a pioneering design by a local authority, a search for lightness and prefabrication in all parts of the building and an early example of a tall flexible structure'.<sup>14</sup> Other buildings completed in line with the Scheme 4 design for the Civic Centre include the Bledisloe Building (1965) and, eventually, the Aotea Centre (1990).

original situation or character of site: The Civic Building was built near what used to be the north end of Greys Avenue, where Auckland's fledgling Chinatown was located. The area was commonly described as a 'slum'. The council acquired the land, demolished the buildings (which were identified as being occupied by 'Asiatics') and rerouted streets, including the clearance of the north end of Greys Avenue and the east end of Cook Street, and the creation of Mayoral Drive to ensure the retention of an east-west link to replace that formerly provided by Cook Street. These changes cleared the way for the new Civic Building and the southern end of the new civic square.<sup>15</sup>

### 2.3 Relevant persons/organisations

original owner(s)/patron(s): Auckland City Council

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<sup>8</sup> Skinner, 'T. K. Donner', p. 55

<sup>9</sup> Robin Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rise: The Auckland City Administration Building', *Habitus 2000* (conference), Perth, 2000, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Skinner, 'T. K. Donner', p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Skinner, 'T. K. Donner', pp. 171-73.

<sup>12</sup> Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rise', p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Skinner 'Disarticulated High Rise', p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', p. 81.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Gatley, 'Shabby and Shambling: Decadent Housing in Greys Avenue', in Christine McCarthy (ed.), *'From Over-Sweet Cake to Wholemeal Bread': The Home & Building Years: New Zealand Architecture in the 1940s* (Wellington: Centre for Building Performance, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008), p. 51.

architect(s): Tibor K. Donner (chief architect, Auckland City Council), Ewen M. Wainscott (deputy chief architect, Auckland City Council), R. M. Parker (supervising architect)

landscape/garden designer(s): n/a

other designer(s): n/a

consulting engineer(s): Vern Coleman (senior structural engineer), John A. Blume (consulting structural engineer from California, USA)

building contractor(s): James Wallace & Co. Pty. Ltd. (main contractor), McLeod Construction Co. Ltd (in association)

Tibor Karl Donner (1907-1993) was born in Hungary and grew up in Romania. His family moved to New Zealand when he was 21. Unlike many of New Zealand's émigré architects, he studied architecture after his arrival here, at Auckland University College, rather than in Europe. He worked in private practice from 1932 to 1938; in the Public Works Department / Ministry of Works from 1938 to 1948, on both civilian and military/defence projects, including military hospitals; and for the Auckland City Council from 1948 to 1967. It is in the latter capacity that he is best known, with key works including the Khyber Pump Station (1947), the Parnell Baths (1951-57), the Civic Building (1954-66) and Ellen Melville Hall (1958-62). His official title was chief architect (with lower case letters), working under the City Engineer.<sup>16</sup> Donner's own house and associated studio buildings in the west Auckland suburb of Titirangi (1947) are also much admired, and retain his experiments with ceramic tiled building elements.<sup>17</sup>

#### 2.4 Other persons or events associated with the building(s)/site

name: Mrs McElroy, mayoress      association: Mrs McElroy, the mayoress at the time of construction, designed the mayoral suite located on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of the Civic Building (January 1967).<sup>18</sup>

name: Cedric Storey, artist      association: Cedric Storey, was commissioned to make the metal casting of the Auckland City Coat of Arms that is fixed to the Civic Building's north façade. The casting is 18 ft (5.4 m) high and fixed 200 ft (60 m) above ground level.<sup>19</sup>

event: Statue of Lord Auckland, a gift from the West Bengal Government, 1969. This statue was relocated from Calcutta, India, to the outside of the main doors of the Civic Building. The sculpture was designed and made by H. Weeks in 1846.<sup>20</sup>

#### 2.5 Summary of important changes after completion

type of change: removal of viewing platform access on top floor

date: early – mid 1970's

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<sup>16</sup> Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rise', p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> For information on the Donner House, Parnell Baths, Civic Building and Ellen Melville Hall, see Julia Gatley (ed), *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904-1984* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), pp. 47, 78, 117, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Skinner, 'T. K. Donner', p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> Graham W. A. Bush, *Advance in Order: The Auckland City Council from Centenary to Reorganisation 1971-1989* (Auckland: Collins, 1991), p. 311. Bush refers to ACC drawing 12642/537.

<sup>20</sup> H. Weeks, 'Statue of Lord Auckland', 1846, Sculpture.

circumstances/ reasons for change: building security and safety

effects of changes: Public access has now been restricted to ground floor use only for security reasons. Originally there was a public viewing platform on top of the building, allowing panoramic CBD views of the Auckland CBD. The viewing platform was closed in the 1970s due to safety concerns.

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

type of change: front door/entrance relocation and weather protected porch addition

date: mid – late 1980s

circumstances/ reasons for change: extreme weather exposure when accessing the building

effects of changes: The front door relocation and addition detracts from the building's original design. However, this change is not fundamental to the overall building's architectural design value and could be easily reversed. The front door has been moved one structural bay south from the original location, which opened directly into the lift lobby. Exterior glass screening now creates an enclosed pedestrian portico/shelter as a solution to the weather exposure experienced when entering and leaving the building.<sup>21</sup> These changes have improved the functionality of the building and the experience for building users and were designed to be reversible, should this be required in the future.

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

type of change: bridge link to Aotea Centre

date: 1989

circumstances/ reasons for change: addition of a sheltered access way between the Civic Building and the adjoining Aotea Centre building.

effects of changes: The bridge link addition was designed with the Aotea Centre building project (1990). This addition protects users from the elements when moving between the two adjoining buildings. Connecting to the rear western side of the Civic Building and set back from the Civic Centre, this addition does not impede the main views of the building and therefore does not diminish the aesthetic value of the building.

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

type of change: mezzanine enclosure with glass screening

date: 1989

circumstances/ reasons for change: privacy for workers from public spaces

effects of changes: The mezzanine enclosure greatly diminishes the main foyer's architectural impression and its grandeur. The glass wall screening reduces the spatial quality of a double-height space. However, it is functionally required to achieve visual and acoustic privacy for

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<sup>21</sup> Bush, *Advance in Order*, plate 22.

workers from the public below. Similar to the front door redesign and bridge link addition, these changes have been essential to improve the functionality of the building and overall experience of the users and were designed to be reversible.

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

type of change: removal of asbestos

date: 1989

circumstances/ reasons for change: severe health danger for building occupants

effects of changes: The removal of asbestos throughout the Civic Building was significant. Originally asbestos was sprayed on all walls and ceilings as a fire-proofing and insulating technique. Subsequent medical research and investigations into asbestos showed that it poses a severe health danger if it is inhaled in a fine dust form.<sup>22</sup> As a result of these medical findings, the internal lining of asbestos in the Civic Building was removed in 1989 at a cost of \$5 million; however, remnants are still extant, in the lift well and corners of the building.<sup>23</sup>

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

type of change: alterations to interior partitions

date: over the years

circumstances/ reasons for change: to suits the needs of changing occupants

effects of changes: interior design and fit-out does not retain its original design integrity

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

type of change: removal of mosaic tile on north wall

date: 2000s

circumstances/ reasons for change: The tiles were removed because some started to fall off and falling tiles were a health and safety hazard.

effects of changes: replaceable

persons/organisations involved: Auckland City Council

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<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Health, 'All About Asbestos', New Zealand Government, 2013, Accessed 20 November, 2013. [https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/resource-files/HE7021\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/resource-files/HE7021_1.pdf), p.4.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Raea, 'Building Stays Despite Asbestos', *Central Leader*, April 11, 2001, p. 3.

### 3. Description of building(s) etc.

#### 3.1 Site/building character

*Summarize main character and give notes on surviving site/building(s)/part(s) of area.  
If a site: principle features and zones of influence; main elements in spatial composition.  
If a building: main features, construction and materials.*

The Civic Building is located between Mayoral Drive, Greys Avenue and Queen Street, and fronts onto Aotea Square. It is an elegant nineteen-storey high-rise and an example of international modernism applied to the high-rise office typology.

The building runs north-south with a narrow footprint measuring 132 by 48 feet (40.2 x 14.6 metres).<sup>24</sup> These dimensions set the building apart from many New Zealand high-rises, which tend to have squarer footprints and centrally placed service cores (housing lifts, stairs, toilets, etc.) circuted by usable floor space. In the narrow Civic Building, service cores are located at either end rather than in the centre. This influenced the exterior form and appearance, with cladding systems varied in response to internal function.

At both ends, then, staircases run the full height from the two basement levels to the top of the building. The staircase at the south end is a service/fire escape, while the main staircase in the north-east corner is encased by glass, creating a point of interest where the building fronts onto Aotea Square. Behind it, in the north-west corner where lifts are located, precast concrete panels measuring 11 feet 4 inches by 7 feet 3 inches (3.4 x 2.2 metres) provide the cladding and create a solid background for the large and prominent Auckland Coat of Arms, fixed at high level on the north façade.

The main east façade is modulated by a rhythmic structural system. Five main bays are created, each with four windows. Curtain wall units are used, combining aluminium sunshades, clear panel glass, grey panel solar glass and precast perlite (glass) spandrel panels. The curtain wall module is 4 feet (1.2 metres). The building's north-east corner is further differentiated here, by means of a projecting balcony, in part serving to disguise toilet windows. The top floor is partially recessed and a cornice above effectively crowns or terminates the building. On the west façade, metal sunshading louvres have been used in both the horizontal and vertical directions.<sup>25</sup>

More than just providing the rhythm for the cladding units and panels, the structural system is fundamental to the building's significance. It is a steel-framed building, introducing to New Zealand the use of column-beam moment connectors.<sup>26</sup> This means that the columns and the principal beams were fastened together with high tensile bolts rather than being welded with diagonal braces. The technique allowed for the structural bending moments to be safely transferred through the frame, without the need for shear walls for bracing, and internal floor space could be used efficiently and flexibly.<sup>27</sup> Construction was faster because the steel members were prefabricated. In addition, on-site welding was minimised, as welded column connections were limited to every third floor. Steel columns are an average of 2 feet (600 mm), on a grid with 20-foot (6 metre) spacings in the longitudinal direction. Between the main beams, smaller secondary beams help to support the floor slabs. These comprise a metal tray decking system, topped by thin concrete shear floors.

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<sup>24</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', pp. 84-86.

<sup>26</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', p. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rose', pp. 8-9.

The main entrance on the east façade provides direct access into a double-height lobby with mezzanine offices and access to the main stairwell and lifts at the building's north end.<sup>28</sup> Above, each administrative floor (levels 1-15) has a circulation corridor running down the centre, enclosed offices on the east side and open plan offices on the west. The interior uses fibrous plaster acoustic ceiling tiles, GIB wall linings with a white painted surface finish, carpeted floors and folded steel plate stairs. Both staircases have open terrazzo concrete slab treads. Internal partitioning is a combination of fixed panels to create offices, and mobile panels in the open-plan workspace.

### 3.2 Current use

of whole building/site: Auckland Council administration office

comments: When it was first opened, the building accommodated all the Auckland City Council administrative functions. During the 1980s, central government undertook a major reform of local government and many of the smaller local borough councils on the Auckland Isthmus were amalgamated. This governance reform effectively doubled the Auckland City Council's area of jurisdiction. With the additional administrative programme and increased council workforce, the Auckland City Council outgrew the Civic Building. However, the site remained the central civic administrative hub with additional ward facilities dispersed throughout the city in the form of service centres.<sup>29</sup>

In 2010, another local governance structure was instigated, merging Auckland's seven local authorities and the Auckland Regional Council to create a unitary authority called the Auckland Council, colloquially referred to as the Auckland Super City. Today, the Civic Building is still functioning as the city's administrative head office and is therefore functioning as originally designed.

Since 2001 there have been proposals to discontinue its use as the council's administration offices. However, no date has been confirmed to do so (see section 3.4).<sup>30</sup>

### 3.3 Present (physical) condition

of whole building/site: The building has been adequately maintained but ongoing maintenance has substantial challenges due to the continued presence of asbestos in the interior linings. The bulk of the asbestos was removed in 1989, but in 1998 more was discovered in the lift wells and corners of the building.<sup>31</sup> The asbestos has limited the building's maintenance to a level of minimal renovation and alteration due to potential health risks when it is disturbed.<sup>32</sup> Other defects have been remedied when the work will not disturb the asbestos. However, larger issues such as leaks have not been resolved due to the complications caused by the remaining asbestos.

of surrounding area: The building is linked to the adjacent Aotea Centre to the north and Mayoral Drive to the south. Significant changes have occurred in this area since the original construction of the Civic Building. Though it was the tallest in Auckland at the time of design, the Civic Building was soon joined by taller buildings, but is still visible in the round and none of its immediate neighbours challenges it for height. In 2010, Aotea Square was redesigned and

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<sup>28</sup> Mitchinson, 'Auckland City Council Administration Building', pp. 84-86.

<sup>29</sup> Bush, *Advance in Order*, p. 400.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Orsman, '\$10m to Rid Akl of Sick, Rusting Civic Building', *New Zealand Herald*, November 5, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2013. [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10845139](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10845139)

<sup>31</sup> Raea, 'Building Stays Despite Asbestos', p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Raea, 'Building Stays Despite Asbestos', p. 3.

refurbished by Hawkins Construction to restore it 'as the city's leading open space and events venue'.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.4 Note(s) on context, indicating potential developments

The ongoing asbestos problem may impact upon the fate of the building. Demolition is the greatest threat. The building's demolition has been estimated to cost \$10 million. The alternative option is to refurbish the Civic Building at an estimated cost of \$70 million. The Auckland Council has recently purchased the much larger ASB building on the corner of Victoria Street West and Albert Street with the intention of housing 2400 council workers there within the next ten years. The future of the Civic Building is not yet resolved as the whole of Auckland Council's demand for office space is under review, to rationalise its activities as the new 'Super City'. Proposals for the building's future will be presented to city councillors at the end of 2014.<sup>34</sup>

## 4. Evaluation

*Give the scientific reasons for selection for DOCOMOMO documentation*

These sections draw from Robin Skinner's various evaluations of the building and its significance.<sup>35</sup> His expertise is acknowledged.

### ***Intrinsic value***

#### **4.1 technical evaluation:**

The Civic Building is of national significance for its technological value. Unlike most New Zealand high-rises of the period, it was steel framed. It advanced steel construction in New Zealand by adopting a prefabricated system. This reduced the time needed for construction. Furthermore, the structural system was novel in New Zealand because, upon the recommendation of Californian engineer John A Blume, it used bolted moment connectors at the column-beam joints rather than welded diagonal bracing. The flexible steel frame followed international developments in engineering, and combined this with locally developed 'aluminium extrusions, neoprene window seals and ceramic acoustic tiles'.<sup>36</sup> The building also introduced a new flooring system into New Zealand, in the form of metal tray decking with a concrete topping. This created much thinner concrete floors than had been previously employed in this country. For all of these reasons, the building sits at the forefront of national developments in mid-twentieth-century construction and technology. According to Skinner, the building was '[p]roduced with limited resources [and] it represents a considerable achievement to use and extend new technology'.<sup>37</sup>

#### **4.2. social evaluation:**

The southern end of Aotea Square, adjoining the Civic Building, sits in place of Auckland's original Chinatown, which was cleared using public money because it was considered to be a 'slum', an eyesore and a disgrace to the city. The site thus tells us much about 1950s attitudes towards ethnic minorities. It is regrettable that no visual evidence of the old Chinatown remains, given the popularity of historic Chinatowns in cities such as San Francisco and Melbourne. The neighbouring site of the Auckland Town Hall has been identified as a pa site and the Horotiu Stream that flowed in this area has cultural heritage significance for Auckland Maori.

<sup>33</sup> Hawkins Construction, 'Aotea Square', Accessed 16 December, 2013, <http://hawkinsconstruction.co.nz/aotea-square/>

<sup>34</sup> Orsman, '\$10m to Rid Akl of Sick, Rusting Civic Building'.

<sup>35</sup> See Skinner, 'T. K. Donner'; Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rise'; and Robin Skinner, 'Auckland City Administration Building (now known as the Civic Building)', in Julia Gatley (ed.), *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904-1984* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008), p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> Skinner, 'Auckland City Administration Building (now known as the Civic Building)', p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rise', p. 1.

Beyond this problematic history, the Civic Building and its site are of social and historic significance as the local governance and administrative base for the Auckland Council, and before it, the Auckland City Council, over a period of almost 50 years. As the preeminent council venue, the building has hosted numerous activities and events shaping the development of Auckland city and the Auckland region over the years. It included the offices of the mayor and town clerk (now the chief executive) on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor, thus reinforcing the civic importance and status of the building.

The building also conveys the confidence of Auckland City Council in the 1950s and 1960s: it is a landmark building, bold and ambitious and therefore a symbol of a progressive Auckland City Council and indeed a progressive Auckland, the Queen's City being the fastest growing city in New Zealand at the time of completion.

Access to much of the building is limited to council employees. This means that access is denied to members of the public. However, public service counters are located at the ground floor level and it is here that many members of the public do experience something of the building's interior, paying rates bills, requesting information from council staff and such like.

#### **4.3. cultural and aesthetic evaluation:**

The Civic Building was initially designed in 1951, as part of the fourth scheme for the Auckland Civic Centre. The design was to include the council chambers, an auditorium, government offices and the administration building. Today, the Civic Centre remains relatively true to this original scheme and, within it, the Civic Building is a key building.

The Civic Building is an important landmark both within the civic precinct and beyond it, in the broader CBD. It is a modernist high-rise building, following models 'from the Americas'.<sup>38</sup> It is notable for its tall, slim proportions, expressed structural grid and modular curtain walling. Changes in materiality and detail ensure that the different functional parts of the building are legible externally. They also add visual interest and variety to the individual elevations. Internally, the narrow proportions maximise natural day-lighting and afford a range of excellent views of the city.

The Civic Building was designed by the Auckland City Council's chief architect, Tibor Donner. Donner was an important architect in New Zealand during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>39</sup> He had a particular interest in materials and technology, and liked to employ innovative construction techniques in his buildings. This is evident in the design, structure and detailing of the Civic Building, which brought international developments in high-rise construction to New Zealand. Donner was very interested in such developments and experienced them first-hand on his world fact-finding tour of 1956, during the design of the Civic Building.<sup>40</sup>

#### ***Comparative significance***

#### **4.4 canonical status (local, national, international)**

The Civic Building is of national significance for its architectural merit and technological achievement. Its slender proportions and construction technology differentiate it from other 1950s and 1960s commercial high-rise buildings such as the eleven-storey AMP Building on the corner of Queen Street and Victoria Street, Auckland (1958-66, designed by Thorpe Cutter Pickmere & Douglas).

The national significance of the building has been recognised by DOCOMOMO New Zealand, in its inclusion of the building on its 'top 20' list of modern buildings in New Zealand. DOCOMOMO

<sup>38</sup> Skinner, 'Disarticulated High Rise', p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas Lloyd Jenkins, *40 Legends of New Zealand Design* (Auckland: Random House, 2006), p. 47.

<sup>40</sup> Skinner, 'T. K. Donner', p. 55.

NZ has recognised its style, building form and materials as unique to New Zealand at the time, as well as its technological advancement.<sup>41</sup>

The Civic Building was also included in *Long Live the Modern*, a book developed under the auspices of DOCOMOMO New Zealand, identifying 180 of New Zealand's best and most important extant modern buildings, sites and neighbourhoods.<sup>42</sup>

#### **4.5 historic and reference values:**

Auckland was developed and modernised in the post-war period, with the design of its first motorways from 1950 and their construction that decade; the design and construction of the Auckland Harbour Bridge from 1951 to 1959; and initiatives to finally build a Civic Centre, as detailed above, being designed from 1951 and realised in the 1960s.<sup>43</sup> The Civic Building was fundamentally important to the latter, being both a visual landmark due to its form, height and extensive glazing and a symbol of the Auckland City Council's ambition and modernity.

The Civic Building and its site are of historical significance as the administrative base for the Auckland Council, and before it, the Auckland City Council, over a period of almost 50 years. Complementing the building's governance and administrative uses, the civic precinct can be interpreted as the heart of Auckland city and the home to much of its public life, including cultural activities and events in both the square and the surrounding civic buildings. For example, the Aotea Centre and Town Hall buildings accommodate music, theatre, university graduation ceremonies, public meetings, conferences and many more.

## **5. Documentation**

### **5.1 archives/written records/correspondence etc. (state location/ address):**

Auckland Council Archives, 44-46 Lorne Street, Auckland 1010.

Heritage Collections & Services, Central City Library, 46 Lorne Street, Auckland 1010.

### **5.2 principal publications (in chronological order):**

'Auckland City Council Administration Building'. *Home and Building*, Vol. 29, No. 6, November 1966, pp. 60-63.

Hay, Keith Eric. 'Auckland City Council Administration Building Report', BArch building report, The University of Auckland, 1967.

Mitchinson, S. W. 'Auckland City Council Administration Building'. *New Zealand Institute of Architects Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3, March 1968, pp. 80-86.

Bush, Graham W. A. *Advance in Order: The Auckland City Council from Centenary to Reorganisation 1971-1989*. Auckland: Collins, 1991.

Skinner, Robin. 'T. K. Donner: The Architect'. BArch thesis, The University of Auckland, 1994.

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<sup>41</sup> Dennis Sharp and Catherine Cooke (eds), *The Modern Movement in Architecture: Selections from the DOCOMOMO Registers* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000), p. 191.

<sup>42</sup> Skinner, 'Auckland City Administration Building', p. 149.

<sup>43</sup> See Elizabeth Aitken Rose, 'Auckland's First Motorways' and 'Auckland Harbour Bridge', in Gatley (ed.), *Long Live the Modern*, pp. 63, 91.

Skinner, Robin. 'Disarticulated High Rise: The Auckland City Administration Building'. *Habitus 2000: A Sense of Place, Perth, 5-9 September 2000* (conference), Perth, 2000.

Sharp, Dennis and Catherine Cooke (eds), *The Modern Movement in Architecture: Selections from the DOCOMOMO Registers*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000.

Raea, Steve. 'Building Stays Despite Asbestos'. *Central Leader*, April 11, 2001.

Lloyd Jenkins, Douglas. 'Tibor Donner'. *40 Legends of New Zealand Design*. Auckland: Random House, 2006.

Rose, Elizabeth Aitken. 'Auckland's First Motorways' and 'Auckland Harbour Bridge'. In Julia Gatley (ed.), *Long Live the Modern: New Zealand's New Architecture, 1904-1984*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2008, pp. 63, 91.

Skinner, Robin. 'Auckland City Administration Building (now known as the Civic Building)'. In Gatley (ed.), *Long Live the Modern*, p. 149.

Gatley, Julia. 'Shabby and Shambling: Decadent Housing in Greys Avenue'. In Christine McCarthy (ed.), *'From Over-Sweet Cake to Wholemeal Bread': The Home & Building Years: New Zealand Architecture in the 1940s*. Wellington: Centre for Building Performance, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008, pp. 46-52.

Orsman, Bernard. '\$10m to Rid Akl of Sick, Rusting Civic Building'. *New Zealand Herald*, November 5, 2012, p. A10.

Auckland City Council. 'Auckland City Council: Cultural Heritage Inventory'. Accessed November 19, 2013. <https://chi.net.nz/CHIPlacesPublic.aspx?id=74316>

Ministry of Health. 'All About Asbestos'. New Zealand Government, 2013. Accessed 20 November, 2013. [https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/resource-files/HE7021\\_1.pdf](https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/resource-files/HE7021_1.pdf)

Hawkins Construction, 'Aotea Square', Accessed 16 December, 2013, <http://hawkinsconstruction.co.nz/aotea-square/>

### **5.3 visual material (state location/ address)**

original visual records/drawings/photographs/others:

Auckland Council Archives, 44 – 46 Lorne Street, Auckland 1010.

recent photographs and survey drawings:

film/video/other sources:

### **5.4 list documents included in supplementary dossier**

n/a

## **6. Fiche report**

name of reporter: Lauren Speer, C/- Julia Gatley

address: c/- School of Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand

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International working party for  
**documentation and conservation**  
of buildings, sites & neighbourhoods of the  
**modern movement**

telephone: +64 (0)9 9234656  
date of report: January 2014

fax: n/a

e-mail:

**examination by DOCOMOMO national/regional section**

approval by wp co-ordinator/registers correspondent (name): Ann McEwan  
sign and date: 25 April 2014

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**examination by DOCOMOMO ISC/R**

name of ISC member in charge of the evaluation:

comment(s):

sign and date:

ISC/R approval:

date:

wp/ref. no.:

NAI ref. no.:

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The west elevation. Photograph by Julia Gatley.



Detail of the glazing on the west elevation. Photograph by Julia Gatley.

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