

APPLICATION FOR HERITAGE LISTING OF MCGREGOR HALL (PART OF THE TURNER HOSTEL COMPLEX)

Responses to ACT Heritage Register - Nomination Form

SECTION 01

Application for Urgent Decision

Are you requesting an urgent decision on this nomination - Yes*

Reason for request - Development Plans are well advanced to demolish the building in late August
Current Heritage significance assessment – Prepared by Pip Giovanelli, Heritage and Conservation specialist

SECTION 02

Details of Nominated Place or Object

Place - yesType - Historic

Name of Place - McGregor Hall Building (Formerly The Canberra Pensioners Club and originally the recreation hall of Turner Hostel)

Location - Civic Section 21 (Block number unknown) - Corner of Marcus Clarke and Barry Drive Civic

SECTION 03

Your Details

Name: Mr David Howe

Address: GPO Box 2539 Canberra 2601

Phone: (mobile) 0407 213 825

Do you have any personal association with the place or object? - Yes

If yes how would you describe yourself - Visitor and occasional user of the hall

SECTION 04

Determining Heritage Significance

A	not meet
B	meets
C	High
D	High
E	n/a
F	High
G	High
H	High
I	n/a
J	Meets
K	n/a
L	n/a

SECTION 05

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The building, of which McGregor Hall is a part, is the last remaining structure of the former Turner Hostel, and of the other six major hostels constructed to accommodate the rapid population influx into Canberra in the post WWII period (circa 1950). This was a significant phase in Canberra's growth and one that needs to be understood in the telling of Canberra's history.

The building retains much of its original detail, particularly in its windows and doors and is therefore rare as an example of the Turner Hostel type, and representative of the form and detail of Government accommodation provided to workers in the post WWII period.

The 1950s hostel and accommodation story is yet to be fully explored and documented. As the last surviving example of the type, the building has the potential to act as an important focus and reference place in gathering oral histories, and understanding Canberra's mid 20th century development phase.

The 2013 Centenary of Canberra will acknowledge the National Capital's significance both nationally and

internationally as a 20th century designed city. Its post WWII growth and development are important aspects of the city's evolution and, as the last surviving component of this important part of Canberra's first 100 years, the Macgregor Hall Building has particular importance.

One end of the building includes a hall that was used for many years as a senior citizens meeting place, and more recently for regular dance and music practice and performance. The hall's characteristics, especially including its dance floor, are considered by the community user groups to be the best in Canberra. Because of these characteristics, the building is used on a regular basis and is very highly valued by its community. Users talk in glowing terms of its ambience and atmosphere. The building may also have value for former residents of Turner and the other six hostels since demolished around Canberra.

When viewed from Barry Drive, the building has a pleasing form and scale that is enriched by its timber windows and central gable. Its location behind a small landscaped area of mature trees and shrubs further enhance its aesthetic value. The building in its treed setting makes an important contribution to Civic's western entry.

McGregor Hall is a potent reminder of Canberra's history. By maintaining a tradition of entertainment and recreation over 60 years it is an important reminder of our physical history as a city and it demonstrates through this cultural traditional a connection with previous generations of Canberrans.

To whom is it significant

As the last remnant of an important phase in Canberra's history, it is clearly important to the whole of the ACT.

At the same time it may be significant to a much broader Australian audience. The analysis of hostel type accommodation in Australia, from convict days through to 21st century refugee immigrant accommodation, has yet to be undertaken. Benevolent hostel accommodation such as that provided at the Turner Hostel is part of this history and hence the McGregor Hall hostel building should be seen as part of a much broader discourse, and one that Australia urgently needs to undertake.

At a more local level, it is clearly significant to its current user group, (dancers, musicians and music lovers) and the visiting artists and participants who attend functions organised by those groups. Over a year, this numbers many thousands of people. The age range is very wide.

While workers who were accommodated in the hostel or similar hostels are an obvious group for whom McGregor Hall might hold some significance its long history as community hall is bound to be significant to many older Canberrans. The original cultural tradition of a community recreation facility has survived, in part revived by government remedial works that were undertaken in 1979 prior to the hall being donated to the Canberra Pensioners Club.

How and why is it significant

Criteria are in italics

(a) it demonstrates a high degree of technical or creative achievement (or both), by showing qualities of innovation, discovery, invention or an exceptionally fine level of application of existing techniques or approaches;

MacGregor Hall has a sprung dance floor that is considered by many to be the finest in the ACT.

The quality of the floor is such that a number of Canberra's dance groups have chosen the Hall as the preferred place for dance, including Gaby's dance group, the Flamenco Club and the Jump Town Jive group. The dance area is larger than many to be found in ACT venues and is a particularly attractive blond colour.

(b) it exhibits outstanding design or aesthetic qualities valued by the community or a cultural group;

The building is a long single-storey structure facing Barry Drive. It has a central gable, timber-famed windows and plain cement-sheet cladding. Between the building and Barry Drive is an attractive landscaped area with

mature trees.

The scale of the building is domestic and the relationship between its length and height combined with its central gable, create a very pleasing proportion. This is further enhanced by its setting behind and beneath the mature trees with the small park-like garden in front, when viewed from Barry Drive. It is a most attractive combination and acts as a delightful but unassuming gateway or entrance to the main part of civic.

The building has not been particularly well maintained over the years and its current condition tends to detract from its appearance.

Inside, the scale, proportion and arrangement of spaces of the hall work very well. The full roof height over the dance floor, with exposed hardwood trusses, is balanced by the more intimate sitting space along the side. This is reminiscent of many old country halls.

The spaces, while not overtly designed and decorated (like for example the Albert Hall), nevertheless “work” for the wide variety of users. The design and aesthetics seem to be perfectly fitted for the users who describe the hall as having the right “ambience”, “atmosphere” and “character”. These attributes are the goal of good design. It is the lucky combination, or happenstance, of scale and proportion, combined with the blond coloured flooring and direct relationship to the outside, that make the design of the interior so successful.

(c) it is important as evidence of a distinctive way of life, taste, tradition, religion, land use, custom, process, design or function that is no longer practised, is in danger of being lost or is of exceptional interest;

As the last remnant of the Turner Hostel, and of the other hostels of that time, the Macgregor Hall building is the last remaining evidence of that way of life, land-use, design and function that is no longer practiced, but is important in understanding Canberra’s mid 20th century growth and housing solutions. The way of life is of considerable interest, but not yet well studied. The place is about to be lost as a result of proposed site developments.

(d) it is highly valued by the community or a cultural group for reasons of strong or special religious, spiritual, cultural, educational or social associations;

This hall is highly valued by its users who include dance and music groups. An indication of the level of community support for the hall is illustrated by the highly popular Facebook page dedicated to its preservation. However it is the continuing use as a recreational facility by various community groups that best demonstrates an ongoing cultural tradition associated with a specific place, something that is rarely found in Canberra. Dance groups describe the hall thus:

McGregor Hall is widely held as the best venue for swing social dances IN AUSTRALIA. A perfect combination of good-sized dance floor, seating, stage, kitchen and retro decoration. Social dances every Thursday fortnight go off, as do more special events, and weekly classes are also held there. A perfect venue for all manner of community events, including live music, many kinds of dancing, community meetings, et cetera. (Facebook posting, June 21, 2010).

And another

Jumptown Swing uses the hall twice a week, it's been our unofficial home for a few years now. We love it, and dancers from all over Australia love it when they visit for our yearly festival, Canberrang. We always run into other community and dance groups using it when we arrive for our time slot. Ideal for so many reasons, it has become a community hub and a lot of groups would be displaced with it's loss. (Facebook posting June 22, 2010)

The Canberra Music Club has found the hall ideal for promotion of local and interstate music groups. It is perfect for “homegrown” musicians because of its size, ideal location, dance floor and character. Although the CMC’s attachment is fairly recent it has become a place that is highly valued by them and their extended member base and audiences for social and community reasons.

(e) it is significant to the ACT because of its importance as part of local Aboriginal tradition;

N/A

(f) it is a rare or unique example of its kind, or is rare or unique in its comparative intactness;

The McGregor Hall is the last surviving remnant not only of the Turner Hostel, but of the several hostels (Ainslie, Capital Hill, Hillside, Eastlake, Riverside, Fairbairn and Turner) built to accommodate Canberra's rapid population growth in the immediate post World War II period. Built to house 300 workers Turner Hostel was *to follow similar lines to the Capital Hill Hostel, which official's claim is the most modern in Canberra. It will consist of a central administrative and dining building with self contained accommodation pavilions. A similar hostel is being considered for Reid near the Constitution Avenue and Corranderrk Street.* (CT 21 Jan 1949). In December 1950 the Canberra times reported that *there are 2,980 persons awaiting houses on the official Government Housing list.* The Turner Hostel played an important role in the provision of urgent accommodation during a highly significant period of Canberra's growth.

The growth phase and in particular the post WWII hostel construction program would appear to be poorly documented, if at all. Canberra is the most significant 20th century designed city in Australia, and possibly the world. Its early design and establishment phases have enjoyed considerable research and attention to date. In 2010 another population boom is placing considerable stress on the city's ability to accommodate its population. The 1950 population boom, and government's built-housing response is an important part of Canberra's history. This is particularly the case as the city moves to its centenary in less than three years. It is important that there are representative examples of earlier building fabric if the story of Canberra's first 100 years is to be faithfully told.

The McGregor hall building is highly significant against this criterion

(g) it is a notable example of a kind of place or object and demonstrates the main characteristics of that kind;

McGregor Hall building is an example of the type of construction used throughout the Turner Hostel. The building is clearly able to demonstrate the scale, appearance and construction of the overall hostel complex, as most of the buildings were very similar in appearance.

(h) it has strong or special associations with a person, group, event, development or cultural phase in local or national history;

It is strongly associated with the Post WWII population boom in Canberra.

(i) it is significant for understanding the evolution of natural landscapes, including significant geological features, landforms, biota or natural processes;

N/a

(j) it has provided, or is likely to provide, information that will contribute significantly to a wider understanding of the natural or cultural history of the ACT because of its use or potential use as a research site or object, teaching site or object, type locality or benchmark site;

As the last surviving building of the Turner Hostel complex, and one that has a surprisingly high degree of integrity, the Hall building has considerable potential as a benchmark or teaching site. It may also be important as a focus for collecting the stories (oral histories) of former tenants.

(k) for a place—it exhibits unusual richness, diversity or significant transitions of flora, fauna or natural landscapes and their elements;

N/a

(l) for a place—it is a significant ecological community, habitat or locality for any of the following:

- (i) the life cycle of native species;*
- (ii) rare, threatened or uncommon species;*
- (iii) species at the limits of their natural range;*
- (iv) distinct occurrences of species.*

N/a

SECTION 06

Further Supporting Information

Current Owner; **ANU**

Is the owner aware of the nomination - **NO**

Does the owner support the nomination - **NO** (intends demolition)

Designer/architect – unknown (government architect)

Builder - unknown

Built - 1949/50800

Brief History

In the period after the 2nd World War an ambitious building program commenced in Canberra (in 1950, 564 houses were built by the government in Canberra). The population of Canberra at the time was approximately 15,000. Accommodating the influx of construction workers and tradesmen was a serious problem which was addressed by the construction of a number of worker's hostels. These buildings were uniformly cheaply and quickly built, each worker was accommodated in a nine foot square room and provided with communal facilities. The Canberra Times reported on January 21, 1949 that construction of the hostel was to commence in "a few weeks" at a cost of one hundred thousand pounds. It was expected to house 300 workers.

There were seven such hostel constructed, the Turner Hostel was the last and similar in design to the former Reid House. They were located in Ainslie (now the site of Ainslie Village), Capital Hill, Hillside, Eastlake, Riverside, Fairbairn and Turner. McGregor Hall was originally the recreation hall for workers accommodated in the Turner Hostel. It is the last remaining remnant of any of the seven hostel constructed to accommodate the army of single construction workers and tradesmen (150 of whom immigrated from Germany) who were crucial to the government's post war building program in Canberra.

From 1949 to 1953 the Hostel was used as accommodation. Then in 1953 - three halls (A,B,C) were handed over to the Bureau of Mineral and Resources and three halls (D,E,F) were granted to the ANU (then Canberra College). The ANU continued to use its halls until their demolition in 2007. The Department of Education and Science took over the halls vacated by the BMR in 1965 and later in the 1960's the Department of Education vacated. From 1978 to 2007 halls A, B and C were used by various community groups including the Conservation Council and ANU Food Co-op.

In 1980 the Department of Capital Territory refurbished the recreational hall and gifted it to The Canberra Pensioners Club. The name McGregor might be a tribute to a past president of the club, Gordon McGregor. The Pensioners Club undertook the care and maintenance of the property and are responsible for the garden on the northern side of the land. The Pensioners Club continued to hold community events in the hall until they were relocated to Gunghalin in 2003. From 2004 to the present (2010) the hall has been leased to Gaby's Dance Studio by the ACT Department of Housing and Community Services. After a short period of inactivity, community events again returned to hall. Gaby's manages the use of McGregor Hall by various community groups.

Key significant features

Key significant features include:

- The footprint and form of the whole building,
- The external central gable facing Barry Drive,

- The external timber windows dating to c1950,
- Internal doors and associated trim dating to c 1950.
- Roof tiles dating c1950 and identical to the former Reid House
- The sprung dance floor,
- The mature trees and garden between the building and Barry Drive, which was established by the pensioner group and contributes to the aesthetic value of the place.

Current physical condition - see photos

Generally the condition is good, although a few sheets of fibro are cracked. The building needs minor repairs and maintenance as is natural for a community building that has had little major maintenance, probably since 1980. It is not yet clear when the dance floor and truss roof were added. At present the hall roof cladding and south windows are not in harmony with the rest of the building. This is, however, superficial and could be fairly easily remedied.

Imminent threats –

The building is earmarked for demolition in 2010 to make way for a development project as part of the ANU's plans for the site known as 'ANU Exchange'. The pensioner's garden is also to be demolished.

Supporting documents – see attached

Notes on photographs

- DSC_4647.jpg - The building as viewed from Barry Drive
- DSC_4639.jpg - The north facing gable and Pensioners Garden
- DSC_4637.jpg - Timber window frames c1950
- DSC_4645.jpg – Roof tiles c1950
- 008195.jpg - ACT Archive image, Minister for the Capital Territory, Mr Bob Ellicott, re-opens the Senior Citizens' Hall in Turner 1980
- DSC_4654.jpg – Pensioners Club function 1994
- IMG_0828a.jpg – Swing dancing McGregor Hall 2007
- Interior_Hall_2010.jpg – The hall interior
- Passage_Way_2010.jpg – Looking west along the building interior
- linedrawing1.jpg – Artist impression of the part of the hostel complex