

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works

REPORT

relating to the proposed construction of a

COMMONWEALTH OFFICE BUILDING

Townsville, Queensland

(First Report of 1981)

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

1981

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

R E P O R T

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(Twenty-sixth Committee)

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EXTRACT FROM
THE VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
NO. 5 DATED 3 DECEMBER 1980

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12. PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE - REFERENCE OF WORK - COMMONWEALTH OFFICE BUILDING, TOWNSVILLE, QLD: Mr. McVeigh (Minister for Housing and Construction), pursuant to notice, moved - That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Construction of a Commonwealth office building, Townsville, Qld.

Mr. McVeigh presented plans in connection with the proposed work.

Question - put and passed.

C O N T E N T S

WITNESSES

Borger, R.H., Esq., Executive Officer (Planning and Review), Department of Administrative Services, Queensland Region, 295 Ann Street, Brisbane, Queensland

Dal Bon, Mrs. K., Acting Assistant Secretary, Planning and Review Branch, Property Division, Department of Administrative Services, Caga Centre, South Tower, Canberra City, Australian Capital Territory

Eaton, D.R., Esq., Associate Director, Projects, Department of Housing and Construction, Queensland Region, 145 Eagle Street, Brisbane, Queensland

Fowler, G.R., Esq., Branch Secretary/Treasurer, Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association, ACOA House, 297 Adelaide Street, Brisbane, Queensland

Harvey, B.E., Esq., Principal Architect (Accommodation) Department of Housing and Construction, John Curtin House, Brisbane Avenue, Barton, Australian Capital Territory

Reynolds, Alderman M.F., Mayor of the City of Townsville, P.O. Box 1268, Townsville, Queensland

Southgate, N., Esq., District Clerk, Mains Roads Department, Wills Street, Townsville, Queensland

Wohlfahrt, B.E., Esq., Project Manager, Department of Housing and Construction, Queensland Region, 145 Eagle Street, Brisbane, Queensland

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PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC WORKS

COMMONWEALTH OFFICE BUILDING,
TOWNSVILLE, QUEENSLAND

R E P O R T

By resolution on 3 December 1980, the House of Representatives referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for investigation and report the proposal to construct a Commonwealth Office Building at Townsville, Queensland.

The Committee has the honour to report as follows:

THE REFERENCE

1. The proposal referred to the Committee is to replace existing widely dispersed accommodation with a single office complex on Commonwealth land bounded by Walker, Stanley and Wills Streets. The building will accommodate 600 people and will include:

- a basement providing storage areas and secure parking for official vehicles;
- three floors of office accommodation; and
- site landscaping and an open car parking area.

2. The estimated cost of the proposal is \$8.7 million at August 1980 prices.

THE COMMITTEE'S INVESTIGATION

3. The Committee received written submissions and drawings from the Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Housing and Construction and took evidence

from their representatives at a public hearing in Townsville on 11 and 12 February 1981. Written submissions and evidence were received from the Council of the City of Townsville, the District Engineer for the Queensland Main Roads Department and the Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association. Written submissions were received from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and the Australian Public Service Association and letters were received from two firms of Queensland architects.

4. Prior to the public hearing, the Committee inspected most of the existing office accommodation and the site for the proposed building. The Committee also inspected the old Customs House building.

5. The Committee's proceedings will be printed as Minutes of Evidence.

BACKGROUND

6. The Department of Administrative Services is responsible for the lease and purchase of office premises for all Commonwealth departments and statutory authorities funded from the Budget.

7. The Commonwealth owns five buildings and leases an additional thirteen in the Townsville district. Of the owned buildings, two were constructed in the 1930s while the Commonwealth Offices in Sturt Street and the Customs House date from the last century.

8. The fifth building is the Department of Housing and Construction's experimental solar project at Garbutt.

EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

9. Premises currently occupied by the Commonwealth in Townsville reflect their piecemeal acquisition and refurbishing over the years and is, for the most part, of a poor standard. There is little prospect of effecting improvements to the accommodation as a general upgrading would be expensive while the possibility of expansion at existing locations, particularly those leased would be negligible.

2.

THE NEED

10. With the continuing growth of Townsville as a regional centre for North Queensland, there will be an increase in Commonwealth functions in the area, requiring additional staff. If the present system of 'ad hoc' leasing were to continue then the problems generated by diffuse property holdings will be unnecessarily perpetuated.

11. The present holdings, both owned and leased, are unsuitable and inadequate for refurbishing to achieve any consolidation although some areas of waste space do occur. Even if the owned properties alone were to be upgraded a significant shortfall would still occur between Commonwealth requirements and property availability over the next decade.

12. A major need exists for the key public contact departments to be collocated for the convenience of the public. Some departments are spread over two locations at opposite ends of the main shopping area causing considerable inconvenience thus adding to administrative problems and costs.

13. Committee's Conclusion The existing Commonwealth office accommodation in Townsville is widely dispersed and unsatisfactory. The Committee agrees that collocation of the majority of Commonwealth departments in one building will both aid the public in their dealings with the Commonwealth and improve the functioning of Commonwealth departments in the Townsville area.

THE PROPOSED WORKS

14. Planning and Design The proposal is for the construction of a three-storey air conditioned office building containing approximately 8600 square metres of net usable floor area providing office space for around 600 employees. The building will incorporate a basement for departmental storage and secure undercover parking for 68 official vehicles.

3.

15. The building will consist of a basement, ground floor and two upper floors and extend along the Walker Street frontage to the corner of Stanley Street. Pedestrian access ways will connect the building to the Townsville City Council administration building, the Main Roads Department building and the City Centre. Ground floor treatment will incorporate set-backs to provide covered shaded access to the entrance lobbies and to individual departments. In designing the building facade, particular care will be taken to ensure it relates to the tropical environment and complements the architecture of adjacent buildings.

16. The ground floor will be designed to provide separate but integrated shop front offices for public contact departments. Upper floors will accommodate general purpose office accommodation and areas with high fitting costs and/or special requirements such as computer facilities, laboratory equipment, library and registry facilities. The building will be fully air conditioned and carpeted to allow implementation of the open plan office concept to achieve better overall space utilisation.

17. Although it was advised that food services would not be provided in the proposed building, the Committee is of the view that further consideration should be given to this aspect, particularly in the light of the current policy review on food services by the Government.

18. Full regard to the requirements of the handicapped has been incorporated in the design. Access via ramps or from basement parking by suitably sized lifts will be available as well as sign posting for the visually impaired and specialised toilet facilities on all floors.

19. Energy Conservation The building will incorporate energy saving measures which can be justified on the basis of the total owning and operating costs, or "life cycle costs" of the building. Both passive and active conservation measures will be used.

20. Sun control will be provided by tinted glass with sun-screens to all windows and thermal insulation will be provided at roof level. Multiple chillers and air handling

plants will be provided to give efficiency of operation and flexibility during normal and after hours. A variable volume air distribution system will allow for energy efficient control and reduced energy consumption.

21. Occupants At present the building is intended to provide office space for the majority of Commonwealth public servants in Townsville. During the course of the hearing, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, in a written submission, stated it did not wish to be housed in a Commonwealth office building in order to preserve its independent stance from both Commonwealth and State authorities. The Committee is unable to accept that the Authority would be disadvantaged by being located in the proposed Commonwealth Offices.

22. During the hearing, the Committee was also informed that 17 staff members of the Customs Bureau will continue to be located at the old Customs House in unsuitable conditions. The Committee believes that some benefits may be gained by relocating the staff of the Customs Bureau within the proposed building. The Committee was also informed that the Townsville City Council is interested in developing the old Customs House for community purposes.

23. Cyclone Shelter The Committee noted with concern that in planning an office building in an area subject to cyclones, no consideration was given to the possible use of the building as a cyclone shelter, and whether it would be required as a post-disaster function building.

24. The Department of Housing and Construction should liaise with State and local authorities responsible for disaster planning to determine whether this proposal should, in whole or in part, be designated and constructed as a cyclone shelter.

25. Committee's Conclusions The design of the proposed building is satisfactory. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

Authority should be included as a tenant in the detailed planning stage. Consultations should take place between the Departments of Administrative Services and Business and Consumer Affairs to resolve the future of the old Customs House and the Committee be provided with a report. The Department of Housing and Construction should liaise with State and local authorities responsible for disaster planning to determine whether this proposal should, in whole or in part, be designated and constructed as a cyclone shelter.

SITE

26. The site, bounded by Walker, Stanley and Wills Streets, is 8116m² in area, is located within the administration precinct of the City of Townsville and compatible with current zoning. It was selected following investigations of a number of alternatives in 1975 with acquisition being completed in 1979.

27. The site was originally acquired at Flinders and King Streets for this proposal but due to changes in patterns of development and location of commercial operations and the possibility of inundation by tidal surge during cyclonic disturbance, it remained unused. This site was exchanged for additional land owned by the Council on the final site with a cash settlement being made in the Council's favour.

28. Car Parking The Committee was concerned that the Department of Administrative Services maintained that the Commonwealth has no policy on car parking which relates spaces to either number of occupants or floor area apart from its intention to co-operate with local authorities.

29. In 1978, the Department of Housing and Construction provided advice to the Committee on car parking policy and this is contained in the Committee's Forty-first General Report. This policy, which the Committee has been given to understand is still current, provides for the Client Department to initially examine and estimate its parking requirements, having regard to the general rule of providing parking for:

- official/operational vehicles;
- customer vehicles;
- vehicles belonging to disabled persons; and
- vehicles used regularly for official purposes.

30. The car parking policy continues:

"The extent to which on-site parking can be provided is dependent on any one or a combination of factors including the activities of the Client Department, the availability of public transport, the requirements or attitudes of the State or Local Authority concerned, the space available on the site and the expense of providing such parking space without incurring excessive cost.

10. The foregoing factors naturally vary from project to project and on whether the building is to be built in the inner city, suburban or country area. It is a case, therefore, of each individual project and site being considered on its merits. As such, this is the policy of the Commonwealth relating to car parking for private vehicles. "

31. In this instance, there was no attempt made to design a building that would incorporate sufficient car parking for employees, let alone provide car parking space for members of the public calling on the Departments housed in the building.

32. Taking into account the weather pattern in Townsville, the lack of public transport and the distance to be walked from city car parks in inclement weather, the Committee feels that the Department should have made a greater effort to meet local government requirements in this instance.

33. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth liaise with the State and local government bodies on the provision of car parking for use by the general public when visiting the Government precinct in the Walker and Stanley Streets area.

34. Committee's Conclusion The site selected is suitable. The Government should clarify its policy on car parking to ensure that, where possible, future projects comply with local authority by-law provisions.

LIMIT OF COST

35. The limit of cost of the work when referred to the Committee was \$8.7 million at August 1980 prices. The limit of cost is made up as follows:

	\$
	5 725 000
Building works	2 485 000
Engineering works	490 000
Civil works	8 700 000

PROGRAM

36. Following approval for the work to proceed, it is estimated that detailed design and documentation to enable calling of tenders will take 10 months. Construction time from the acceptance of a tender will be approximately 15 months.

37. The Committee sought advice as to the economic justification or otherwise of construction the building in a shorter space of time. The Committee considers that the Departments have been deficient in not giving proper consideration to the savings and costs which could result from a speedier completion of the building. These factors should be taken into account in future much more fully than they have been in this reference and the results of this consideration should be reflected in the departmental evidence.

38. Committee's Conclusion The Committee recommends the construction of the work in this reference.

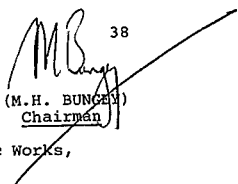
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

39. The summary of recommendations and conclusions of the Committee is set out below. Alongside each is shown the paragraph in the report to which it refers.

	<u>Paragraph</u>
1. THE EXISTING COMMONWEALTH OFFICE ACCOMMODATION IN TOWNSVILLE IS WIDELY DISPERSED AND UNSATISFACTORY.	13
2. THE COMMITTEE AGREES THAT COLLOCATION OF THE MAJORITY OF COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN ONE BUILDING WILL BOTH AID THE PUBLIC IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE COMMONWEALTH AND IMPROVE THE FUNCTIONING OF COMMONWEALTH DEPARTMENTS IN THE TOWNSVILLE AREA.	8.

Paragraph

3. THE DESIGN OF THE PROPOSED BUILDING IS SATISFACTORY.	25
4. THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK AUTHORITY SHOULD BE INCLUDED AS A TENANT IN THE DETAILED PLANNING STAGE.	25
5. CONSULTATIONS SHOULD TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENTS OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES AND BUSINESS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS TO RESOLVE THE FUTURE OF THE OLD CUSTOMS HOUSE AND THE COMMITTEE BE PROVIDED WITH A REPORT.	25
6. THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION SHOULD LIAISE WITH STATE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR DISASTER PLANNING TO DETERMINE WHETHER THIS PROPOSAL SHOULD, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, BE DESIGNATED AND CONSTRUCTED AS A CYCLONE SHELTER.	25
7. THE SITE SELECTED IS SUITABLE	34
8. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD CLARIFY ITS POLICY ON CAR PARKING TO ENSURE THAT, WHERE POSSIBLE, FUTURE PROJECTS COMPLY WITH LOCAL AUTHORITY BY-LAW PROVISIONS.	34
9. THE LIMIT OF COST OF THE WORK WHEN REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE WAS \$8.7 MILLION AT AUGUST 1980 PRICES	35
10. THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK IN THIS REFERENCE.	38


(M.H. BUNCNEY)
Chairman

Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA.

9 April 1981.

APPENDIX A

CONSTRUCTION

40. Structure The building has been designed to withstand cyclonic conditions and will be constructed with reinforced concrete floor slabs, columns, beams and walls which will carry vertical loads and act as wind bracing for the structure. Foundations for the columns and reinforced concrete load bearing walls will be pads and strip footings founded in weathered rock.

41. External Finishes The exterior walls will be minimum maintenance, off-form, light colour concrete compatible with adjacent structures. Window and door frames will be anodised aluminium with tinted glazing to reduce glare. Roofing will be pre-finished insulated metal sheeting.

42. Internal Finishes Office areas will be carpeted with sheet vinyl floors in utility areas. Suspended acoustic tile ceilings, smooth plastered columns and demountable partitions will be used throughout the building. Foyers and lobbies will have tiled and paved floor finishes, textured finishes to lifts and stairwells and suspended ceilings. Toilets will have ceramic tiled walls and non-skid floor surfaces with suspended tile ceilings. Sealed concrete floors and natural finishes to walls and ceilings will be used in service areas. Plant rooms will receive acoustic treatment to reduce noise levels.

43. Mechanical Services Mechanical engineering services will comprise air conditioning, mechanical ventilation, sump pumps and other sundry services. All office accommodation areas will be fully air-conditioned with air handling units located at roof level, and a central plant room in the basement housing chilled water refrigeration equipment, while the cooling towers will be located at roof level. Air conditioning will be augmented to supply computer areas.

44. Mechanical exhaust systems will be provided for the basement car park, toilets, tea rooms, lift motor room, substation, battery room and main switch room. Hot water will be provided by roof-mounted solar units.

45. Electrical Services A substation is to be accommodated for the North Queensland Regional Electricity Board, with sufficient capacity for the current stage of building, but with capability to be expanded to service the ultimate site development. Services provided will include general light and power, exterior security lighting, including the car park, floodlighting of the building, Telecom block cabling and television aerial system.

46. Battery powered emergency evacuation lighting systems will be provided as well as a standby diesel generator to produce power for computer facilities, one lift, fire alarms, emergency warning and communications system, PABX facilities, exit lighting and ventilation fans.

47. No heating plant is required and domestic hot water units will be solar powered with electric boosting. Switching of lights will allow for reduction of lighting levels after hours for cleaners and service areas. Perimeter lights will be turned off automatically when natural lighting levels are adequate. Separate metering of building areas will allow for the effective management of power use.

48. Lifts Two lifts will serve all levels of the development. One will be operable as a service lift while the other will incorporate stretcher provisions and be capable of operating under emergency power supply conditions.

49. Fire Services The building will be protected by a system of thermal detectors and manual call points, with smoke detectors to computer areas and air conditioning systems in accordance with the applicable regulations. An emergency warning and inter-communications system will be provided.

50. Sprinkler protection will be installed in the basement while hydrants and hose reels plus associated booster pumps and storage tanks are to be used elsewhere in the building. Hand held extinguishers of an appropriate type for each area will be provided in accordance with the Queensland Fire Safety Act.

51. Parking Provision will be made for 68 vehicles in the basement with a further 60 cars in the open car park. The basement parking area will have a concrete floor graded to stormwater drainage.

52. Access Service access to the rear of the building will be via the open car park from Wills Street. Access to the basement car park will be via a two-lane concrete ramp from the open car park.

53. Stormwater Drainage This will be directed to the existing box drain which traverses the site to discharge under Walker Street. The section of this drain which passes underneath the building will be reconstructed.

54. Surface water will be collected, for discharge to the box drain, by grated drains and gully pits at the rear of the building and at the Walker Street frontage. Site filling and landscaping will include the provision of a surcharge path from the rear of the building to Walker Street to ensure that extreme stormwater flows will not affect the ground floor or basement.

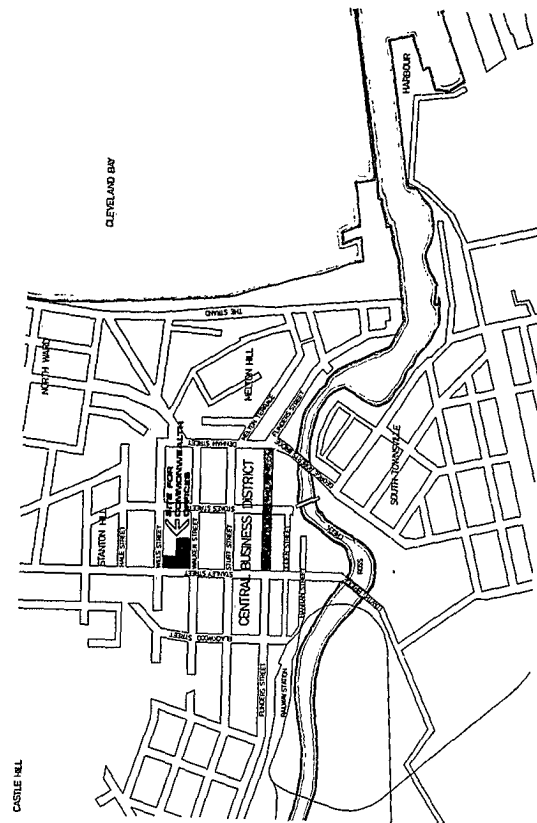
55. Sewerage Existing sewers serve the site and the City Council has confirmed that capacity is adequate to serve the development. Relocation of part of the existing sewer will be necessary to suit foundation requirements.

56. Water Supply Water supply for domestic and fire fighting needs is available at existing 100mm or 150mm mains in Walker, Stanley and Wills Streets.

57. Hydraulic Services These will include hot and cold water supply, chilled drinking water units, boiling water units, sanitary disposal units and normal plumbing and venting.

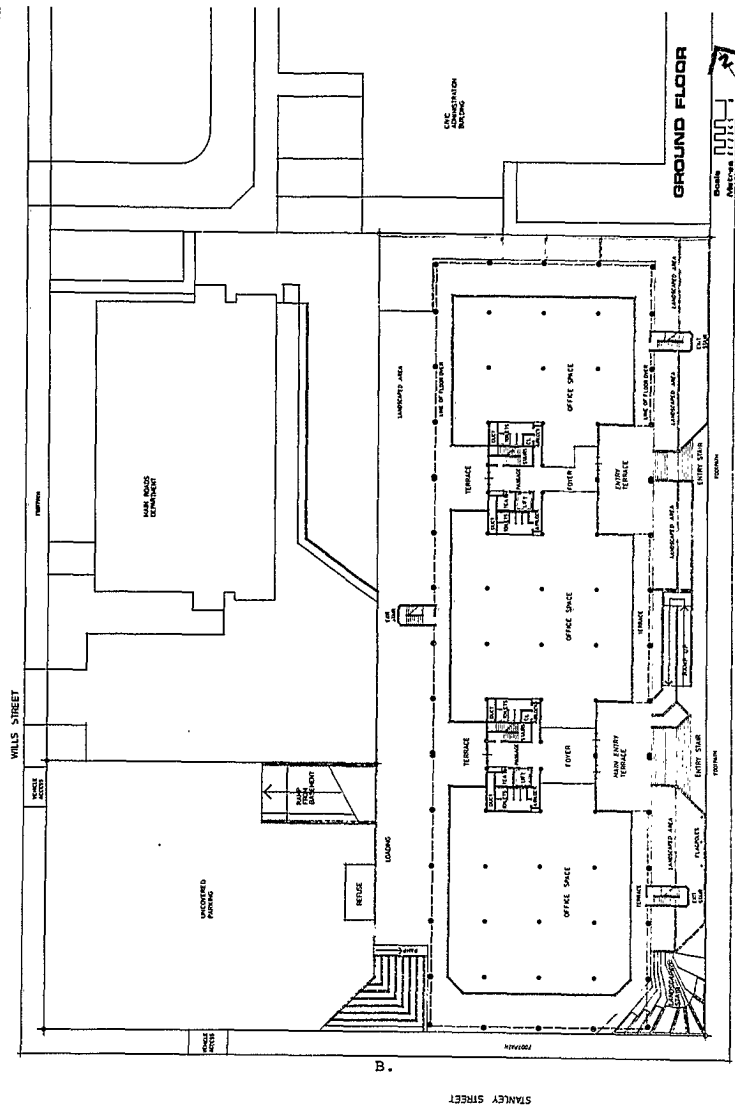
58. Landscaping Landscaping will be provided for the front terraces and the building environs appropriate to the climate and to integrate with the adjoining developments. The open car parking area will be planted with appropriate shade trees.

59. Liaison with Authorities The project has been discussed with the Townsville City Council, the Queensland Government Main Roads Department, the North Queensland Regional Electricity Board and the Environmental Division of the then Department of Home Affairs and the Environment, all of whom support the proposal.



LOCALITY PLAN





Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"

WALKER STREET

GROUND FLOOR

STANLEY STREET

WILLS STREET



PERSPECTIVE VIEW
WALKER STREET

C.