

# TOWN HALL

A Report on Adaptive-Reuses



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## SHAHJAHANABAD

Shahjahanabad was a sovereign city of Mughal India during the period from 1639 to 1739 AD. It is the tenth city of Delhi followed by New Delhi during the period between 1910 and 1916 under the British who ruled from 1803 to 1947. Lal Kot founded by Anang Pal of the Tomar Rajputs in 1052 AD is supposedly the second city of Delhi after the ancient city of Indraprastha followed by Qila Rai Pithora, Siri, Tughlakabad, Jahanpanah, Firuzabad, Din Pnah, Shergarh and Shahjahanabad.

Shahjahanabad, an abode of Shahjahan was founded by the Emperor Shahjahan when he shifted his capital from Agra to Delhi in 1645 and completed it in 1648. He chose a site near river Yamuna in Delhi north of Firozabad. This new city was planned on the western banks of Yamuna River with two main imposing structures; the Red Fort, the imperial seat of power and the Jama Masjid, the religious core of the Mughals. First, the palace, today known as Red Fort, was built. It took ten years to build Red Fort. The city bounded by a stone wall, fourteen gates and ghats was built with Red Fort at its eastern edge. Shahjahan shifted the capital from Agra to Delhi due to heat and hard summers.. The new city was set with beautiful gardens and canals. The city was built in a bow and arrow shape where the arrow was the central main street called as Chandni Chowk. The fort was surrounded by gardens like Angoori Bagh in north and Parada Bagh in south. In the north west, the beautiful Friday Mosque Jama Masjid was built for the city to congregate for Friday prayers. These major landmarks patronised around which an urban hierarchy of katras and havelis was built. The streets and lanes were known by the personalities living there spread organically. Chandni Chowk which generally occupied by the Hindu population saw important shrines like Gauri Shankar Mandir, Gurudwara Sis Ganj, and Lal Jain Mandir coming in the course of time. During the reign of Shahjahan, the architectural development flourished since he had an inclination towards architecture.

After the end of Mughal Empire in 1857, the British took over the city and created some important urban spaces and buildings. Town Hall, Church Mission, Old Delhi Railway Station, Baptist Church, new Darya Ganj were added to the heritage list. Incidentally, after Independence in 1947, the city of Shahjahanabad almost stopped evolving further. No building of any heritage value was created. Rather, the existing heritage started crumbling especially under the unplanned growth of wholesale and noxious trade. Decades after decades, the condition of general living and heritage worsened. The unplanned and uncontrolled urban activities pushed the positive activities out of the city to be replaced by squalor and squatters with traders entirely unmindful of the deteriorating heritage. Even the infrastructure for tourism suffered resulting in a steep fall of tourists to the Walled City. The old havelis were either demolished to create ugly shops or converted in to warehouses and godowns by Wholesale traders. Even the precincts of heritage sites like Jama Masjid, Red Fort, Town Hall etc., were not spared from the from the onslaught of negative impact of unplanned commercialisation.

## INTRODUCTION

Delhi's **150 year old Town Hall** is a landmark building located in Chandni Chowk in historic city of Shahjahanabad – the Walled City popularly known as **Old Delhi**. The location is officially termed Ghanta ghar after a clock tower that once stood here.

Town Hall was the seat of the **Municipal Corporation of Delhi** (MCD) from 1866 during the British Raj till 2010, when MCD offices shifted to the new Shyama Prasad Mukherjee **Civic Centre** in **Central Delhi**. Ever since the relocation, the Town Hall has been lying vacant in a pathetic condition. Spread across 16 acres, this British-era building was planned before India's First War of Independence in 1857. It is a Grade-I Heritage Building notified under Delhi's Building Bye-Laws. After Red Fort and Jama Masjid, it is the most important Heritage Building in Shahjahanabad - the Walled City.

## HISTORY

The site where the present yellow brick-and-stone building with carved white trims stands was once a garden created by Jahanara, daughter of Mughal emperor Shahjahan. The Begum ki Sarai in the garden was a VIP guesthouse and an inn for wealthy Persian traders in the mid-1600s. She built a water tank in front of the Sarai which used to reflect the moonlight, thus giving the place its name—Chandni Chowk.

After the revolt of 1857, one of the first buildings to be rebuilt by the British in Shahjahanabad after destroying the Serai was the Lawrence Institute (now the Town Hall).

The Construction of the building started in 1860, and was completed in 1863. It is constructed out of yellow-painted brick and stone, and carved white stone trim. The **Lawrence Institute** housed **Delhi College of Higher Studies**, before it was bought by the municipality in 1866 for Rs. 1,35,457. Besides government offices, the building also had a library and a European club.

The first major expansion took place in 1898 followed by major additions to and renovation of the building in 1937. Several alterations and additions continued to be made from 1947 onwards till the recent times.

Originally a bronze statue of **Queen Victoria** stood in front of the hall. After independence in 1947, it was replaced with a statue of the **Arya Samaj** leader **Swami Shradhdhanand**. The location is officially termed Ghantaghar after a clock tower that once stood here.

Inauguration plaques bearing the names of Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel, a message from Mahatma Gandhi, oil portraits of national figures, even a symbolic key to the capital once ritually handed over to the new mayor — these artefacts make Town Hall a time-capsule capturing the story of Delhi's development into a megapolis. But sadly, time seems to have stopped in Chandni Chowk for the pale yellow Victorian building with arched windows and Ionic pillars.



Main Entrance



Key of Delhi City used to be given to the Mayor



Standing Committee Hall



Mayor's Meeting Hall



## LAYOUT, BUILDING & AREA

The total land area of the Town Hall premises is 13,735 sqm. There are three buildings . Each with a ground floor and first floor. The main Central building and one each on its eastern and western side are known as Press Building and Dispensary Building respectively. The main building has large courtyards as well as parks on its northern and southern sides. It has several rooms and two meeting halls. In the Dispensary Building, there are five shops on the ground floor under litigation with the occupants. Rest of the building area is with North DMC.

The existing building consists of the typical construction style and materials of mid-colonial period. The thickness of the wall ranges from 750 mm to 1800 mm. Main construction material used in this building include stone, lime plaster, burnt bricks and timber. The building needs structural strengthening, refurbishing and redevelopment without disturbing its originals architectural and heritage value. The details of the covered area of all the buildings are as follows:

Covered area of main building	Courtyard	Press Building	Dispensary Allopathic	Dispensary Ayurvedic	Total (sqm)
8960	1200	2156	600	160	13076



## PRESENT CONDITION

As mentioned above, ever since the relocation of MCD Offices to new Civic Centre, the Town Hall has been lying vacant in a pathetic condition. The structures are dilapidating, vegetational growth is visible on outer walls of all the buildings and the interior portions are stinking. The condition of the press building is similar.

**10 YEARS OF NEGLECT**

Deteriorating structure; damaged windows and doors; an abandoned library; portions of a ceiling on the verge of collapse; water seepage from roof

**LOCATION** Middle of Chandni Chowk

Town Hall served as municipality office site of capital from **1866 to 2011**

Corporations then shifted to Civic Centre on **Minto Road**

Complex spread over **16 acres**

Yellow and white brick structure with carved white-stone rim

**TIMELINE**

- > Construction completed in **1863**
- > Housed Lawrence Institute and Delhi College of Higher Studies
- > In **1866**, municipality bought it for ₹1,35,457; it had a library, government offices and a European club
- > **Aug 10, 1947**, New meeting hall of municipal committee inaugurated by Jawaharlal Nehru
- > **Independence Day, Aug 15, 1947** Statue of Queen Victoria removed and Swami Shraddhanand placed
- > **2010-11** Corporations shift to Civic Centre on Minto Road

**PROMISES OF REVIVAL, BUT NOTHING MATERIALISED**

Announcements made by various mayors between 2012 and 2020: Complex craft bazar; light and sound show; boutique hotel; food court; digital library museum; restaurants, etc



Press Building



Press Building



## PROPOSED ADAPTIVE RE-USES

In the recent tender, North DMC invited the private parties for the following uses: According to the them, “the Town Hall complex may be used for hotel, museums, library, children’s activity rooms, auditoriums for cultural activities with historical significance, demonstration room, light and sound programme, fine dining areas, street food of India, etc. This will provide an excellent historic ambience and experience for citizens to live the culture of the city with modern amenities. The hotel will be the most exciting experience for those who want to be part of the history and culture of Delhi as a living experience.” Earlier also, such type of uses were proposed but nothing reached the end. A parking for the guests was also proposed.

### **Opinion of the Local Residents and Experts**

Keeping in view the neglect and present pathetic condition of the Town Hall, general the opinion that it should be renovated and redeveloped and put to positive use. However, the experts feel that history and heritage of the area should be given a priority on merely earning revenue.

## RECOMMENDED ADAPTIVE RE-USES

Historically, the area under Town Hall and the Town Hall itself have been used for Sarai, VIP Guest House for wealthy traders and Inn during Mughal period, for a College of Higher Studies, European Club and Delhi Municipality Office during British Era and for Delhi Municipal Corporation Offices, Press and Dispensaries after Independence from 1947 till 2010. Since 2011, it is without any proper use.

Keeping the history of the place and the building and views of the local residents and experts, it should be appropriately renovated and redeveloped for the following Adaptive Reuses:

### **Main Building:**

1. A museum-cum-Interpretation Centre for Shahjahanabad showcasing its history, architecture, buildings, havelis, heritage and culture.
2. A Research Centre with a Library dedicated to the history, culture and current issues of Shahjahanabad- the Walled City.
3. Art & Cultural Programmes and Light & Sound show on the highlighting the Late Mughal and early British History in Delhi.
4. Academic discussions and Seminars.
5. Cultural & educational activities related to art, history, heritage & culture.
6. A focal point of heritage tourism of Shahjahanabad. All type of tours and walks of Shahjahanabad will originate from here.
7. A Centre for the Technical Guidance, Assistance and Sanctioning of Building Plans for the heritage notified buildings.

### **Press and Dispensary Buildings:**

1. Boutique hotels on cultural themes for high-end and middle level guests.
2. Restaurants on Shahjahanabad cuisines.
3. Shops on arts & crafts of Shahjahanabad.

### **Necessary Integration and Infrastructure**

1. The Press Building and Dispensary Building will be connected to the main building through an underground dedicated subway to integrate them to the main building complex.
2. An underground parking for the guests can be developed on the Bench & Bar Club plot lying vacant and unused for decades. The parking facility is very important to attract people.
3. The metro station should also be connected to the main building complex through an underground sub-way.

### **Finances**

While the boutique hotels, restaurants, shops and parking services, light & sound show, tourist activities can be organised on public-private partnership, the Museum, Research Centre, Library, Academic Discussions, educational activities can be funded by the Central Govt. under their Museum Grant Scheme, Research schemes and heritage redevelopment schemes etc..

### **Proposed Methodology or Roadmap**

For taking the project forward, a way has been suggested like in the annexure 'A' for appointing an advisor. The opinion and views of all the people and experts should be taken by the adviser to finalise the ideal, viable and sustainable adaptive-reuses.

### **Conclusion**

The Walled City today is plagued by unauthorised construction, illegal activities and over-commercialisation. Its art, culture, history and heritage are suffering due to these activities. The Town Hall should become a symbol of art, culture, history and heritage of Shahjahanabad rather than merely a revenue-earning building. It should become the cultural sub-city of Delhi.