



An aerial view of the old historic building of the Pretoria Magistrate's court that was destroyed by a fire in October 2010.

PICTURE: OUPA MOKOENA

Pretoria court to receive a facelift after fire

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THE HISTORIC old Pretoria Magistrate's Court, which was destroyed by a fire in 2010, will soon receive a facelift to restore it to its former glory.

Restoration, due to have started in January, was delayed due to a procurement process, and consultants, specialising in the restorations of historic buildings, were appointed in November, the Department of Public Works has said.

Departmental spokesman Thami Mchunu said the project design process is expected to be complete at the end of next month.

"Once the design process has been completed, a tender for the construction work will be issued," he said.

The restoration, estimated to cost

about R100 million, will have the building restored to its original state as it was earlier declared a national heritage site. This means that the building, by law, must be restored to its original form unless compelling reasons or circumstances state otherwise.

Mchunu explained due to the nature of the restorations, specialised contractors including technical professionals such as architects specialising in heritage buildings will be working on the building. The renovation is expected to take about 18 months.

A fire - caused by an electrical fault in one of the ceilings in October 2010 - destroyed the building, except for the two lower levels and the building's outer marble-clad structure. Fortunately firefighters prevented the fire from spreading to

the adjacent "modern" building.

Pretoria News earlier reported that although the building belongs to the Department of Justice and the repairs are the responsibility of that department, the funds were allocated by the public works department.

Professor Albrecht Herholdt, a member of the National Cultural Heritage committee said restoring buildings of national heritage is not an easy task but the end result is always worth the effort. He explained that in many instances where old historic buildings were completely destroyed, photographs had to be used for purposes of reconstructing the building as before.

Several plans to accommodate staff housed in the old building had to be made after the fire. Four criminal courts were relocated to the

Centurion Municipal Court building, the Municipal Court in Visagie Street and Court 62 at Pretoria Central Prison.

Because of a lack of space and facilities, the entire domestic violence section was relocated to the Municipal Court, in Visagie Street, and the rest of the family law services to the first floor in the unburned part of the building.

A number of criminal courts were combined and several magistrates' offices were converted into courts to deal with family and private law matters.

These "office courts" are primarily used in matters dealt with in camera. A further 44 dry-wall offices and 22 dry-wall storage areas had been erected in the passages next to and in front of all courts for administrative support staff.