

Wychwood Car Barns

Description

The property at 76 Wychwood Avenue is worthy of designation under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* for its cultural heritage value or interest, and meets the criteria for municipal designation prescribed by the Province of Ontario under the three categories of design, historical and contextual value. Located on the southwest corner of Wychwood Avenue and Benson Avenue, the complex of four car barns identified in the Reasons for Designation were constructed between 1913 and 1921 for the Toronto Civic Railways and its successor the Toronto Transportation Commission (the forerunner to today's Toronto Transit Commission or TTC). The property was listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties in 1998, and authority has been granted for a Heritage Easement Agreement. Four of the car barns, described in the heritage attributes below, have been identified for preservation in the planned redevelopment of the complex for Artscape.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The Wychwood Car Barns have design value as rare surviving examples of buildings associated with the origins of vehicular public transportation in the City of Toronto. Historically, the site contains what is purportedly the oldest surviving car barn (1913) built for the Toronto Civic Railway. The two earliest barns, dating to 1913 and 1916, are now located in the centre of the group where they are set back from Wychwood Avenue in relation to the adjoining structures that conceal their side walls (north and south). The 1921 car barns complement the earlier structures in their height and the use of parapets on the narrow end walls, and the northernmost barn extends closer to Wychwood Avenue. On the 1921 car barn that is located directly south of the 1916 car barn, the east facade is flush with those of the earlier structures, while the building extends further west.

Historically, the complex is associated with the expansion of transportation services in Toronto and innovations in transit equipment. The development of the site dates to 1911 when the City of Toronto formed the Toronto Civic Railways (TCR) to build and operate streetcar lines in annexed areas beyond the city core. The TCR's St. Clair line opened in August 1913, extending from Yonge Street to Station Street (now Caledonia Road). In 1921, the newly formed Toronto Transportation Commission absorbed the TCR along with all existing street railway systems.

In 1913, the City's Works Department began constructing a complex for the storage and repair of TCR streetcars on Wychwood Avenue, south of St. Clair Avenue West. Two car barns (also known as 'car houses') were constructed in 1913 and 1916. In 1921, two additional car barns were completed south of the 1916 section, while a fifth car barn was attached to the north side of the 1913 building (the southernmost barn, dating to 1921, is not included in the Reasons for Designation). The expanded facility housed 50 cars inside and another 110 outside, with nine tracks providing access through the yard.

The Wychwood Car Barns functioned as an operating division of the TTC until 1978. Obsolete PCC (Presidents' Conference Committee) cars, first introduced on the St. Clair line in 1938, were stored in the car barns, along with the only Prototype Articulated Light Rail Vehicle (ALRV) ordered by the TTC. The remainder of the property was leased to the Ontario (later Urban) Transportation Development Corporation for the testing and retrofitting of Canadian Light Rail Vehicles (CLRVs). Prior to the closure of the site in 1985, the linear induction-powered Intermediate Capacity Transit System cars for the Scarborough Rapid Transit Line were retrofitted here.

As a complex of buildings in a park-like setting, the Wychwood Car Barns are important neighbourhood landmarks. The site is located directly north of Wychwood Park, the residential neighbourhood that was the first Heritage Conservation District in the City of Toronto.

Heritage Attributes

The heritage attributes of the Wychwood Car Barns related to their design value as rare examples of buildings associated with the transportation history of the City are found on the exterior walls and roofs of the four northernmost car barns dating to 1913 (north centre), 1916 (south centre), and 1921 (north and south) , consisting of:

- Rising the equivalent of two stories, the post and beam structures that are built of steel and concrete and clad with red brick
- Above metal cornices, the roofs (some with metal trusses) that incorporate skylights extending the length of the buildings
- The 1913 and 1916 barns, where the exposed east and west elevations have parapets surmounted by pediments containing datestones (marked “1913” and “1916”, respectively) on the east and blank roundels on the west
- Attached to the north side of the 1913 structure, the northernmost car barn (1921) with the trio of round-arched openings on the east façade, the organization of the west wall into two bays and, along the north elevation facing Benson Avenue, the flat-headed window openings separated by concrete piers with brick corbels
- On the 1921 car barn that is located directly south of the 1916 car barn, the parapet end walls featuring pediments with a date stone (marked "1921") on the east and a blank roundel on the west, and the door openings with bifolding hinged wood doors on the east and west walls

The fifth car barn (1921) at the south end of the group, the small single-storey addition at the southeast end of the northernmost car barn (1921), and the interiors apart from the skylights and roof trusses, are excluded from the heritage easement agreement and are not included in the Reasons for Designation.