

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

September 9, 2004

To: Toronto Preservation Board
Etobicoke-York Community Council

From: Joe Halstead, Commissioner Economic Development, Culture and Tourism

Subject: 399 The West Mall (Etobicoke Civic Centre) – Inclusion on the City of Toronto
Inventory of Heritage Properties
Etobicoke Centre - Ward 3

Purpose:

This report recommends that the property at 399 The West Mall (Etobicoke Civic Centre) be included on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) City Council include the property at 399 The West Mall (Etobicoke Civic Centre) on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties; and
- (2) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

West District Services have outgrown the Civic Centre and are currently investigating options for expansion. The likelihood that West District Services will relocate has resulted in an exploration of alternative uses of the Centre, including the option of declaring the property surplus and disposing of it to private owners. The City of Toronto Planning Department has requested that the Culture Division assess the Etobicoke Civic Centre for its heritage value.

Comments:

The property at 399 The West Mall (Etobicoke Civic Centre) has been evaluated by staff and is recommended for inclusion on the City of Toronto's Inventory of Heritage Properties. The Reasons for Listing are outlined below.

A location map (Attachment No. 1) and photographs (Attachment No. 2, 3, 4) are attached.

Reasons for Listing:

The property at 399 The West Mall is recommended for inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties for its cultural heritage value and interest.

The heritage attributes of the Etobicoke Civic Centre are found on the exterior elevations and rectilinear design of the building, the interior walls and ceiling of the Council Chamber, the Memorial Clock Tower and the open space between the Centre and The West Mall (currently a parking lot). Located at the south west corner of Burnhamthorpe Road and Hwy. 427, the Civic Centre is architecturally and historically significant as the City Hall for the City of Etobicoke from 1958 until amalgamation with the City of Toronto in 1998.

Historical Significance

After World War II, Etobicoke experienced rapid development throughout the Township. The small rural municipality grew from a population of 5,507 in 1911 to 105,000 by 1958.

Etobicoke's first Township hall, located on Dundas Street west of Burnhamthorpe Road, was originally built in 1843 as a church and purchased in 1886 by Etobicoke Council. The growing Township outgrew the hall and by 1955, offices for Etobicoke staff occupied several buildings at Dundas and Burnhamthorpe.

With the lack of office space, a Special Buildings Committee was formed to explore alternative sites for new accommodation. In 1955, the Committee recommended that the site at Burnhamthorpe Road and Highway #27 be expropriated. The Committee also recommended that Shore and Moffat be employed as the architects, as they had experience in similar projects. The Special Buildings Committee saw a need to develop a concept for the Municipal Centre as well as the need to reserve land for future expansion of government services. The concept encompassed a central library, a health centre and a civic auditorium and was strongly against incorporating shopping facilities.

Site Features

Construction began in 1956 and official opening ceremonies took place on 23 September 1958. The estimated cost of the new Municipal Centre, with furnishings and landscape, was approximately \$2,300,000. Situated to make best use of the existing sloped site, the shape and location of the buildings enabled them to be seen from the surrounding roads and the 80 foot

high clock tower made the Municipal Centre visible from a distance. Originally, the Centre consisted of the former Board of Education building to the north and a Municipal building to the south, joined by an open portico. A quadrangle, which consisted of a courtyard with an ornamental pool (now gone), was situated between the two buildings. East of the ornamental pool was the memorial clock tower, dedicated to those who lost their lives in WWI, WWII and the Korean War. A ceremonial entrance to the building took the form of a drive-walkway circling the building into the parkland. Parking was at the front (west) of the building and was depressed in order to minimize the visual impact of parked cars.

In the mid 1960's, Ontario Hydro purchased a 3 acre plot of land south of the Municipal building. Here they constructed an office building and, in order to accommodate additional parking, alterations were made to the ceremonial entrance on the east side of the centre. In 1969, a new Board of Education building was built to the south of the Hydro building, and the Municipal offices expanded north into the old Board of Education building. In the early seventies, the configuration of the on-off ramp from Burnhamthorpe Road to No 27 was altered, allowing the grounds of the Municipal Centre to expand. In the north west corner of the grounds, a semi-circular rose garden was planted.

By the mid seventies, the population of Etobicoke had grown so much that the Municipal Centre was under pressure to expand. In 1973, the Municipal Centre officially became the Etobicoke Civic Centre. Moffat Shore were hired again to design the extension to the existing buildings. The expansion connected the two building in place of the quadrangle and included a new attached triangular shaped building to the north. With the expansion of the Civic Centre came an increased need for parking, which was situated mostly on the east side of the building, in place of the ceremonial entrance and rose garden.

Today, the City of Toronto occupies all of the buildings on the site. The rapidly growing municipality has once again outgrown its office space and is currently investigating potential properties for a new Civic Centre, which is more accessible by public transportation.

Architectural Significance

The Centre varies in height from one to three storeys, with a flat roof. It is clad in Queenston limestone with reflective glass in aluminium frames. The central portion of the west-facing elevation, where the front entrance is located, is single storey with glass sections across the elevation. The fenestration in each section consists of twelve windows, with four small rectangular windows across the top, four large rectangular windows in the centre and four small rectangular windows at the bottom.

The south portion of the Civic Centre is perpendicular to the central portion. Its north elevation is two and a half storeys in height and is made up of alternating rows of Queenston limestone and windows. The top two rows of windows are nearly-square and the bottom row (at ground level) is horizontally rectangular. The height of the limestone varies, with the centre row the widest. The south elevation of the south portion is similar to the north elevation, however it is three storeys high, with a row of large windows at the ground level.

The northern portion of the Centre (the extension), stands three storeys tall and is triangular shaped in plan. Similar to the south portion, it's elevation is made up of alternating rows of Queenston limestone and windows. With four rows of nearly square windows, the bottom row is below grade on the north and south west elevations.

The council chamber, located near the main entrance, was designed with great attention to detail. It is described in the Official Opening Ceremonies Programme as a "Unique Circular Council Chamber of procedural convenience and structural harmony". Seventy-four feet in diameter, the exterior of the circular chamber is formed with large vertical sections of glass. The fenestration in each section consists of three rows of three equally sized windows, set in aluminium frames. A secondary exit is located on the east side of the chamber, with stairs leading to the adjacent gardens.

The interior walls of the Council Chamber are covered in oak panelling and are set within the glass exterior, allowing space for a corridor between them. The oak panelled walls are in sections, with spaces between which expose the glass sections, allowing natural light to enter the Chamber. The interior ceiling, reaching 21 feet high, is made of triangular shaped beams which gently slope easterly.

On the east side of the building is the 80 foot high Memorial Clock Tower. The Clock Tower was a significant element in the initial scheme of the Centre, as it served as a landmark that was visible from a distance. From the front of the Centre (west side), the tower can be seen in the background, perfectly aligned with the front entrance. During the design process, the local branches of the Canadian Legion expressed interest in erecting a war memorial. Following much consideration, it was decided that the Clock Tower would be dedicated to those who lost their lives in WWI, WWII and the Korean War. A plaque was erected that reads "Lest we forget, in memory of those who gave their lives that Canadians may live. 1914-1918, 1950-1953 (Korea), 1939-1945". The clock tower is modern in style, made of two 80 foot rectangular pillars of concrete and displays square clock faces and cross motifs.

Contextual Significance

The open space between the west façade of the Civic Centre and The West Mall is contextually important for its formal entrance into the Centre. Partially surrounded on three sides by the Civic Centre, the open space is overlooked from the windows of the building.

Conclusions:

It is recommended that City Council include the property at 399 The West Mall (Etobicoke Civic Centre), on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties.

Contact:

Rita Davies
Executive Director of Culture
Tel: 416-397-5323
Fax: 416-392-5600
E-mail: rdavies@toronto.ca

Joe Halstead
Commissioner Economic Development, Culture and Tourism

List of Attachments:

Attachment No. 1 – Location Map
Attachment No. 2 – Photographs – Front (west) Elevation, Front Entrance, North Elevation
Attachment No. 3 – Photographs – Rear (east) Elevation, Exterior of Council Chamber, Interior of Council Chamber
Attachment No. 4 – Photograph – Memorial Clock Tower