

Inclusion on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register, Intention to Designate under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act - 625 Church Street - Supplementary Report

Date: May 17, 2021

To: Toronto and East York Community Council

From: Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning

Wards: University-Rosedale - Ward 11

SUMMARY

The purpose of this Supplementary Report is to respond to the Toronto Preservation Board's request for staff to review and refine proposed heritage attributes for the property at 625 Church Street, and to report to the May 19, 2021 meeting of the Toronto and East York Community Council on the findings of the review.

As a result of staff review and the input of the Toronto Preservation Board, this report contains proposed revisions to the Statement of Significance (Attachment 1) and provides an overview of staff's additional review and analysis. The recommended changes to the property's heritage attributes do not alter the conclusions of the original report that the property is of cultural heritage value.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning recommends that:

1. City Council state its intention to designate the property at 625 Church Street under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, in accordance with the Revised Statement of Significance: 625 Church Street (Reasons for Designation) attached as Attachment 1 to the report (May 17, 2021) from the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on May 12, 2021, the Toronto Preservation Board requested that the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning review and refine the proposed heritage attributes (internal and external) of 625 Church Street and report directly to the May 19, 2021 meeting of Toronto and East York Community Council on the amended attributes and on the findings of the review.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2021.PB24.3>

BACKGROUND

The property at 625 Church Street contains the Traders Building, which was constructed in 1956 for the Traders Finance Corporation and designed by the architectural firm of Marani & Morris. The six storey plus penthouse office building is a fine and representative example of the Neo-Georgian architectural style, and is part of a larger context within the Church and Bloor neighbourhood comprised of corporate office buildings, many designed by Marani & Morris, built during the pre- and post-World War II period. The Traders Building is historically linked with buildings located within the neighbourhood, including the Confederation Life, Manufacturers Life, and Crown Life Insurance Buildings, and is visually linked to the Crown Life Building, located at 120 Bloor Street East at the northwest corner of Church Street.

At its meeting on May 12, 2021 the Toronto Preservation Board considered the report (April 20, 2021) recommending the property at 625 Church Street be included on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register and designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. Members of the community provided written comments and deputations requesting the Board consider the rear (east) façade of the building as a heritage attribute. The Board also questioned whether the interior lobby of the building merited further consideration as a potential heritage attribute. Following questions of staff and discussion, the Toronto Preservation Board requested that staff review both the external and internal features of the building and revise the Statement of Significance as may be necessary.

COMMENTS

The review of the proposed heritage attributes focused on the rear (east) façade of the building at 625 Church Street, known as the Traders Building, and on the interior lobby. The report (April 21, 2021) includes the following description of the east façade:

"The east façade faces into a surface parking lot and continues the pattern of fenestration from the primary (west) façade on floors 2 through 5, with slightly larger rectangular windows on the ground floor. A central brick bay is articulated by vertical recessed brick details and bound by recessed brick panels, and two single door entrances set within concrete door surrounds are located on either side of the bay at the ground floor."

The architectural description also identifies the building's "simple cast stone cornice", which extends to the rear façade and is interrupted by the central brick bay.

The Revised Statement of Significance (Attachment 1) identifies that the building has design value as a "fine and representative example of a mid-20th century office building designed in the Neo-Georgian architectural style." The statement identifies that this style is reflected in the building's tripartite organization, with a distinct base, shaft and capital; the use of brick and ashlar cast stone cladding; and the regular rhythm of fenestration, including the window openings set within cast stone frames and inset from the façade.

The rear (east) façade of the Traders Building contains some, but not all of the identified features described in the Statement of Significance as being reflective of the building type and architectural style. This includes a rhythm of fenestration and window detailing similar to that on the primary (west) façade, and the use of brick and ashlar cast stone cladding. The façade may also, in part, be understood to have a tripartite organization, defined by the larger window openings on the ground floor (the base), the regular rhythm of fenestration on floors 2 through 5 (the shaft) and the cast stone cladding and cornice on the sixth floor (the capital). However, unlike the primary (west) façade, the east façade does not maintain the ashlar cladding on the ground floor, and the continuity of these elements is interrupted by the central bay that articulates the interior vertical circulation. The expression of the building's tripartite organization, and its Neo-Georgian architectural style, is carried through to the east façade, although it is not as strongly conveyed as on the primary façade.

Further consideration of the interior lobby included a review of the building permit drawings and its current state to understand the design and history of alterations. Although the lobby contains features reflective of the building's Neo-Georgian style, and alterations have generally been sensitively incorporated into its design, the lobby was not determined to be rare, unique or representative of a particular style or type, does not display a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit and is not demonstrative or reflective of the work of Marani & Morris. Staff are not of the opinion that the lobby has sufficient design value relating to the proposed Statement of Significance to merit its identification as a heritage attribute.

Following this review, the Statement of Significance has been revised to provide further clarity on the property at 625 Church Street's design value relating to its Neo-Georgian architectural style and the continuity of attributes identified on the primary (west) façade and the rear (east) façade. The proposed revisions include a new attribute specifically relating to the building's tripartite organization, separating it from the attributes relating to the symmetrical organization of the primary (west) façade and the common design

between the two side facades. References to the primary and side facades in relation to the rhythm of fenestration and the cast stone cornice have also been removed.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Revised Statement of Significance: 625 Church Street (Reasons for Inclusion)

625 CHURCH STREET "TRADERS BUILDING"**(REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)**

The property located at 625 Church Street is worthy of designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value, and meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the provincial criteria prescribed for municipal designation under the criteria of design and physical, historical and associative, and contextual values.

Description

Located on the east side of Church Street between Charles Street and Isabella Street, the property at 625 Church Street known as the Traders Building contains a six storey plus penthouse office building built in 1956 and designed in the Neo-Georgian style by the architectural firm of Marani & Morris. Constructed as the headquarters for the Traders Finance Corporation and its numerous subsidiaries, the brick clad building with cast stone detailing is part of the Church and Bloor neighbourhood, an area whose context is defined by the presence of pre- and post-World War II office buildings, many built for insurance companies and designed by Marani & Morris.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value**Design and Physical Value**

Built as the headquarters for the Traders Finance Corporation and designed by the architectural firm of Marani & Morris in 1956, the Traders Building at 625 Church Street is valued as a fine example of a mid-20th century office building designed in the Neo-Georgian architectural style. This architectural style is emblematic of the firm's commissions through the 1930s to 1950s, and is a conservative classical style that responded to the emerging modern architectural movement often employed for institutional and corporate commissions. Features of the Traders Building reflective of this style include the tripartite organization of the building's facades with a distinct base, shaft and capital; the use of brick and ashlar cast stone cladding; and the regular rhythm of fenestration, including the window openings set within cast stone frames and inset from the façade.

Historic and Associative Value

The Traders Building is reflective of the work of the architectural firm Marani & Morris, one of Toronto's leading 20th century modern architectural practices. Comprised of a partnership between Ferdinand Herbert Marani and Robert Schofield Morris, the firm was a leading proponent of conservative modernism in the mid-20th century, responsible for numerous high quality projects for institutional and corporate clients. The Traders Building is emblematic of the firm's high quality - albeit non-controversial and conservative - work, with a decidedly modern massing and form that remains steeped in the principles of classicism and an honesty of materials. The Traders Building was one of the last designs produced by the firm before Robert Morris received the Gold Medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1958, and the promotion of Marvin Francis Allan to partner in 1959. The firm continues to practice today as RDHA.

Contextual Value

Contextually, the Traders Building at 625 Church Street maintains and supports the character of the Church and Bloor neighbourhood, defined by a collection of mid-20th century office buildings, many built for insurance companies and designed by Marani & Morris. The Traders Building is historically linked with buildings located within the neighbourhood, including the Confederation Life, Manufacturers Life, and Crown Life Insurance Buildings, and is visually linked to the Crown Life Building, located at 120 Bloor Street East at the northwest corner of Church Street.

Heritage Attributes

Design or Physical Value

Attributes that contribute to the value of the property at 625 Church Street as representative of the Neo-Georgian architectural style include:

- The scale, form and massing of the 6 storey plus penthouse office building, situated on the east side of Church Street and occupying the full block from Charles Street East to Hayden Street
- The principal (west) façade, with a central bay projecting as a shallow frontispiece on the ground floor
- The symmetrical and tripartite organization of the principal (west) façade, comprised of a distinct base, shaft and capital, and which is, in part, carried through on the rear (east) facade
- The shared design of the two side (north and south) facades
- The setback of the principal and side facades from the sidewalk, which varies on each façade and permits plantings on both the west and south facades
- The use of brick (red brick laid in Flemish bond) and cast stone cladding
- The protruding cast stone entrance bay, including the black granite panels on either side of the aluminum door frame and that extend into the entrance vestibule
- The building name - "Traders Building" - engraved within the cast stone entrance bay on the principal façade and centered above the main entrance
- The regular rhythm of fenestration, comprised of rectangular window openings set within cast stone window frames
- The brick pilasters on the side facades, extending from the foundation to the cornice
- The brick spandrel panels between the pilasters on the side facades, accentuated with protruding header bricks
- The cast stone cladding between the windows on the sixth floor, with a slight reveal below creating a strong shadow line
- The cast stone cornice at the sixth floor

Contextual Value

Attributes that contribute to the contextual value of 625 Church Street as maintaining and supporting the character of the Church and Bloor neighbourhood, and as being historically and visually linked to its surroundings include:

- The setback, placement and orientation of the building, with its primary entrance on Church Street