

## **125 Sylvan Avenue - Notice of Intention to Designate a Property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act**

**Date:** August 8, 2022

**To:** City Council

**From:** Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

**Wards:** Ward 24 - Scarborough-Guildwood

### **SUMMARY**

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This report recommends that City Council state its intention to designate the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue, under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its design, associative, and contextual value.

The property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is situated southeast of Kingston Road and Markham Road in Scarborough Village atop the Scarborough Bluffs. It contains the McNeel House, a one-storey, Mid-Century Modern home constructed in 1963 for Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel and his wife Helen B. McNeel, as designed by Modernist architect James Albert Murray (1919-2008). James Murray was an influential figure within Canadian architecture during the mid-twentieth century who designed several prominent Modernist public buildings, commercial structures, and private residences. A student of Eric Arthur, and later colleague to fellow Canadian Modernists John B. Parkin, John C. Parkin, and Henry Fliess, Murray's bold designs have had a significant impact on Toronto's post-war suburban neighbourhoods, the largest concentration of which are centred in Don Mills.

The McNeel House has an expansive view of Lake Ontario from above Sylvan Park, which spans the bottom of the Bluffs below a row of homes. In 2018, the McNeel House was recognized by Heritage Toronto with a historic plaque to the left of the front driveway along Sylvan Avenue. The plaque pays respect to the McNeel family and to architect James Murray's use of post-and-beam construction paired with natural materials, including stone and cedar, which are among the central elements of the McNeel House's Modernist design.

Heritage Planning Staff have completed the Research and Evaluation Report for the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue and determined that the property meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. As such, the property is a significant built heritage resource.

In June 2019, the More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019 (Bill 108) received Royal Assent. Schedule 11 of this Act included amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act. The Bill 108 Amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act came into force on July 1, 2021, which included a shift in Part IV designations related to certain Planning Act applications. Section 29(1.2) of the Ontario Heritage Act now restricts City Council's ability to give notice of its intention to designate a property under the Act to within 90 days after the City Clerk gives notice of a complete application.

The designation of this property is not subject to Section 29(1.2). There is no active building permit application at the time of this report.

Designation will enable City Council to review proposed alterations or demolitions to the property and enforce heritage property standards and maintenance.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning recommends that:

1. City Council state its intention to designate the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act in accordance with the Statement of Significance; 125 Sylvan Avenue (Reasons for Designation) attached as Attachment 3, to the report, August 8, 2022, from the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning.
2. If there are no objections to the designation, City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the Bill in Council designating the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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

## **BACKGROUND**

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### **Heritage Planning Framework**

The conservation of cultural heritage resources is an integral component of good planning, contributing to a sense of place, economic prosperity, and healthy and equitable communities. Heritage conservation in Ontario is identified as a provincial interest under the Planning Act. Cultural heritage resources are considered irreplaceable and valuable assets that must be wisely protected and managed as part of planning for future growth under the Provincial Policy Statement (2020) and A Place to

Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020). Heritage Conservation is enabled through the Ontario Heritage Act. The City of Toronto's Official Plan implements the provincial policy regime, the Planning Act, the Ontario Heritage Act and provides policies to guide decision making within the city.

Good planning within the provincial and municipal policy framework has at its foundation an understanding and appreciation for places of historic significance, and ensures the conservation of these resources are to be balanced with other provincial interests. Heritage resources may include buildings, structures, monuments, and geographic areas that have cultural heritage value or interest to a community, including an Indigenous community.

The Planning Act establishes the foundation for land use planning in Ontario, describing how land can be controlled and by whom. Section 2 of the Planning Act identifies heritage conservation as a matter of provincial interest and directs that municipalities shall have regard to the conservation of features of significant architectural, historical, archaeological or scientific interest. Heritage conservation contributes to other matters of provincial interest, including the promotion of built form that is well-designed, and that encourages a sense of place.

The Planning Act requires that all decisions affecting land use planning matters shall conform to the Growth Plan and shall be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, both of which position heritage as a key component in supporting key provincial principles and interests.

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90p13>

The Provincial Policy Statement provides policy direction on land use planning in Ontario and is to be used by municipalities in the development of their official plans and to guide and inform decisions on planning matters, which shall be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement. The Provincial Policy Statement articulates how and why heritage conservation is a component of good planning, explicitly requiring the conservation of cultural heritage and archaeological resources, alongside the pursuit of other provincial interests. The Provincial Policy Statement does so by linking heritage conservation to key policy directives, including building strong healthy communities, the wise use and management of resources, and protecting health and safety.

Section 1.1 Managing and Directing Land Use to Achieve Efficient and Resilient Development states that long-term economic prosperity is supported by, among other considerations, the promotion of well-designed built form and cultural planning, and the conservation of features that help define character. Section 2.6 Cultural Heritage and Archaeology subsequently directs that "significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved". Through the definition of conserved, built heritage resources, cultural heritage landscape and protected heritage property, the Provincial Policy Statement identifies the Ontario Heritage Act as the primary legislation through which heritage conservation will be implemented.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/provincial-policy-statement-2020>

A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2020) builds on the Provincial Policy Statement to establish a land use planning framework that supports

complete communities, a thriving economy, a clean and healthy environment and social equity. Section 1.2.1 Guiding Principles states that policies in the plan seek to, among other principles, "conserve and promote cultural heritage resources to support the social, economic, and cultural well-being of all communities, including First Nations and Metis communities". Cultural heritage resources are understood as being irreplaceable, and are significant features that provide people with a sense of place. Section 4.2.7 Cultural Heritage Resources directs that cultural heritage resources will be conserved in order to foster a sense of place and benefit communities, particularly in strategic growth areas.

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/place-grow-growth-plan-greater-golden-horseshoe>

The Ontario Heritage Act is the key provincial legislation for the conservation of cultural heritage resources in Ontario. It regulates, among other things, how municipal councils can identify and protect heritage resources, including archaeology, within municipal boundaries. This is largely achieved through listing on the City's Heritage Register, designation of individual properties under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act, or designation of districts under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Section 27 of the Ontario Heritage Act gives municipalities the authority to maintain and add to a publicly accessible heritage register. The City of Toronto's Heritage Register includes individual heritage properties that have been designated under Part IV, Section 29, properties in a heritage conservation district designated under Part V, Section 41 of the Act as well as properties that have not been designated but City Council believes to be of "cultural heritage value or interest."

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o18>

Ontario Regulation 9/06 sets out the criteria for evaluating properties to be designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The criteria are based on an evaluation of design/physical value, historical and associative value and contextual value. A property may be designated under section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/060009>

The Ontario Heritage Toolkit provides guidance on designating properties of municipal significance, including direction on the purpose of designating heritage properties and information about how the Provincial Policy Statement and the Ontario Heritage Act provide a framework for the conservation of heritage properties within the land use planning system. In June 2019, the More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019 (Bill 108) received Royal Assent. Schedule 11 of this Act included amendments to the Ontario Heritage Act (OHA). The Bill 108 Amendments to the OHA came into force on July 1, 2021, which included, amongst other matters, amendments to the listing and designation processes. Guidance from the Province related to the implementation of Bill 108 Amendments is forthcoming.

[Ontario Heritage Tool Kit \(gov.on.ca\)](https://www.ontario.ca/gov/ontario-heritage-tool-kit)

The City of Toronto's Official Plan contains a number of policies related to properties on the City's Heritage Register and properties adjacent to them, as well as the protection of areas of archaeological potential. Indicating the integral role that heritage conservation

plays in successful city-building, Section 3.1.5 of the Official Plan states that, “Cultural heritage is an important component of sustainable development and place making. The preservation of our cultural heritage is essential to the character of this urban and liveable City that can contribute to other social, cultural, economic and environmental goals of the City.”

Policy 3.1.5.4 states that heritage resources on the City's Heritage Register "will be conserved and maintained consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, as revised from time to time and adopted by Council."

Policy 3.1.5.6 encourages the adaptive re-use of heritage properties while Policy 3.1.5.26 states that, when new construction on, or adjacent to, a property on the Heritage Register does occur, it will be designed to conserve the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of that property and will mitigate visual and physical impacts on it.

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/official-plan/>

<https://www.historicplaces.ca/media/18072/81468-parks-s+g-eng-web2.pdf>

## **COMMENTS**

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The City of Toronto's Heritage Register contains a limited number of properties from the Mid-Century Modern period of architecture, which includes Toronto City Hall. In 2019, Council authorized phased implementation of the Toronto Heritage Survey, a transformative approach to the identification of cultural heritage resources that looks beyond traditional approaches to understanding architectural significance. The identification and conservation of the built heritage from the modern era has been the subject of increased interest activity across Canada. The city-wide heritage survey will provide an opportunity to identify buildings and landscapes of the post-war era such as the McNeel House that reflect both international and regional explorations in modern architecture and urban design that survive throughout the City.

Following the Toronto Preservation Board meeting on May 10, 2022, the owner of the property and his architectural designer met with Heritage Planning staff to gain an understanding of the heritage designation process and to discuss the cultural heritage value of the McNeel House to further inform this report. This exchange of new and relevant information about the architectural features of the house was very helpful. These productive discussions also provided an opportunity to explore the heritage considerations for a project proposal to renovate the house that conserves the clerestory and related interior sunken living room and building a new garage adjacent to the original walkway.

## 125 Sylvan Avenue

Research and Evaluation according to Ontario Regulation 9/06



125 Sylvan Avenue: View of the principal (north) elevation, Heritage Planning, 2022

### 1. DESCRIPTION

125 Sylvan Avenue	
ADDRESS	125 Sylvan Avenue
WARD	24 – Scarborough-Guildwood
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	PLAN 2235 PT LOT 116 PT LOT 117 RP64R12679 PART 3
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	Scarborough Village
HISTORICAL NAME	N/A
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1963
ORIGINAL OWNER	Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel and Helen Barbara McNeel
ORIGINAL USE	Residential (Single-family house)
CURRENT USE*	Residential (Single-family house)
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	James A. Murray, architect
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS	Post-and-beam (steel with wood)
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	Mid-Century Modern
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	N/A
CRITERIA	Design/Physical, Associative/Historical, Contextual
HERITAGE STATUS	NOL
RECORDER	Heritage Planning, Adrian Gamble and Cecilia Nin Hernandez
REPORT DATE	August 8, 2022

## 2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation section of the report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue, and applies evaluation criteria as set out in Ontario Regulation 9/06, under the headings of historical/associative, design/physical and contextual value to determine whether they merit designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

The application of the criteria is found in Section 3 (Evaluation Checklist). The conclusions of the research and evaluation are found in the Conclusion of the report. Maps and Photographs are located in Attachment 1. The archival and contemporary sources for the research are found in Attachment 2. The Statements of Significance are contained in Attachment 3.

### i. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Key Date	Historical Event
	The area now known as the City of Toronto is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit (1805), and the Williams Treaties (1923) signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.
1796	With the establishment of the Town of York in 1793, the surrounding region was subdivided into townships with Scarborough Township located east from York Township along the shore of Lake Ontario. Scarborough was surveyed with concessions and lots, typically of 200 acres in 1796.
1892	The Toronto and Scarboro' Electric Railway, Light and Power Company introduces radial rail service along Kingston Road. <sup>1</sup>
1914	Guild Inn built atop the Scarborough Bluffs (east of 125 Sylvan Avenue) as a rural retreat for artists, craftspeople, and architects.
1919	James Albert Murray born in Toronto.
1920	Scarborough landowners A.E. Rea, J.W. McNab, and Cecil White begin to subdivide their holdings along the shore of Lake Ontario. <sup>2</sup>
1921	J.W. McNab sells PLAN 2235 PT LOT 116 PT LOT 117 (future site of 125 Sylvan Avenue) to the Township of Scarborough

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1 Scarborough Historical Society. "Streetcars and/or Subway to extend deeper into Scarborough?" June 12, 2014. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at: <http://scarboroughhistorical.ca/tag/radial/>

2 D.B. McCowan. "A Lakefront Estate Residential Development, 1890-1940. James McCowan Memorial Social History Society. 1989. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at: <http://mccowan.org/lakefron.htm>

1927	TTC takes over operation of the Scarboro' Line and extends the tracks east to the Birchmount Loop. <sup>3</sup>
1943	James Murray graduates from the University of Toronto's architecture program under the supervision of prominent Toronto Modernist architect Eric Arthur. <sup>4</sup>
1944	PLAN 2235 PT LOT 116 PT LOT 117 (future site of 125 Sylvan Avenue) sold to Opal Boynton and Anna M. Hilliard; large farmstead established atop the Bluffs
1947	Murray Bennington Heights; a Modernist split-level bungalow which sets the tone for much of his future residential work. <sup>5</sup>
1954	TTC terminates streetcar service to the Birchmount Loop, thereby opening up Kingston Road to increased automobile traffic; suburban development increases. <sup>6</sup>
1954	Murray joins fellow Modernist architect Henry Fliess and others in a partnership with Macklin Hancock to design dozens of middle-class bungalows and split-levels for the "New Town of Don Mills." <sup>7</sup>
1954	Murray designs the new headquarters for Hugh MacLean Publications at 1450 Don Mills Road. <sup>8</sup>
1955	Murray co-founds Canadian Architect magazine with James A. Daly, president of MacLean-Hunter; Murray listed as editor. <sup>9</sup>
1956	Murray designs Donway United Church at 230 The Donway West. <sup>10</sup>
1960	Boynton and Hilliard sell PLAN 2235 PT LOT 116 PT LOT 117 (future site of 125 Sylvan Avenue) to Helen B. McNeel.
1961	Murray & Fliess design the North York Public Library. <sup>11</sup>
1962	Murray & Fliess design the Cloisters of the Don at 10 Roanoke Road <sup>12</sup>

3 Scarborough Historical Society.

4 Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada. "Murray, James Albert." Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at: <http://dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/node/1896>

5 Robert Moffatt. "James Murray's model for modern living." Toronto Modern. 2015. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at:

<https://robertmoffatt115.wordpress.com/2015/07/20/james-murrays-model-for-modern-living/>

6 Scarborough Historical Society.

7 Dave LeBlanc. "The unheralded passing of an architectural force." Globe and Mail. May 28, 2009. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/real-estate/the-unheralded-passing-of-an-architectural-force/article4275192/>

8 Behar Moiz et al. North York's Modernist Architecture, 2010. ERA Architects. 2010. 20. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at: [https://www.eraarch.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/NYMA\\_2010\\_Colour.pdf](https://www.eraarch.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/NYMA_2010_Colour.pdf)

9 Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada.

10 Moiz et al. 57.

11 Ibid, 89.

12 Ibid, 68.

1963	Murray designs the Shoicet House at 21 Park Lane Circle in the Bridle Path <sup>13</sup>
1963	Murray designs the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue upon the Scarborough Bluffs <sup>14</sup>
1994	McNeel House sold to Roger Allan Slute and Mary Irene Krahn, the first of a small number of owners since the McNeels occupied it.
1995	OAA award Murray with the Architects Order of Da Vinci <sup>15</sup>
2008	Murray dies at age 88.

## ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The following section outlines the history and facts related to the property which are the basis for determining 'Historical and Associative Value' according to O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria.

### 125 Sylvan Avenue: The McNeel House

The location of the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is shown on the property data map (Image 1) where it stands on the south side of Sylvan Avenue between Catalina Drive and Bethune Boulevard. The subject property sits atop the Scarborough Bluffs along the shore of Lake Ontario in the neighbourhood of Scarborough Village.

The site was originally part of a large expanse of rural farmland which abutted the shoreline of Lake Ontario from atop the Scarborough Bluffs (Image 2). Sold to the Township of Scarborough in 1921 by J.W. McNab as part of a larger subdivision plan between partners McNab, A.E. Rea, and Cecil White, the land was subdivided and sold to a host of private owners.<sup>16</sup> The future site of 125 Sylvan Avenue was once a double lot, constituting a small farmstead owned between 1944 and 1960 by Opal Boynton and Anna M. Hilliard (Image 3).<sup>17</sup> The Boynton-Hilliard estate was subdivided and sold in 1960 to Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel and his wife Helen B. McNeel.<sup>18</sup> In 1963, the McNeel's commissioned James Murray to build their home atop the Bluffs at 125 Sylvan Avenue (Image 4). The McNeel House was sold by the original owners in 1994, and has since only changed hands twice up to the date of its most recent sale in 2021.

Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel was a renowned psychiatrist and Second World War veteran whose pioneering work in the area of combat exhaustion and shellshock greatly influenced the operational nature of Canada's modern military (Image 5).<sup>19</sup> During the liberation of Europe in 1944, Dr. McNeel commanded the No. 1 Corps Exhaustion Unit

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>14</sup> Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO). "McNeel House." 2022. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at: <https://acotoronto.ca/building.php?ID=12219>

<sup>15</sup> Moiz et al. 102.

<sup>16</sup> Ontario Land Registry Records, PLAN 2235 PT LOT 116 PT LOT 117

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Terry Copp. "Broken in Battle: The Invisible Casualties." Terry Copp: Canadian Military Historian. 2012. Accessed on April 7, 2022 online at: <https://terrycopp.com/2017/05/19/broken-in-battle-the-invisible-casualties/>

in Normandy in the face of numerous reports of debilitating fatigue and duress among the forces.<sup>20</sup> During his time among the troops, McNeel was instrumental in changing prevailing attitudes about troop discipline and the importance of compassion when dealing with issues of mental health in the military.<sup>21</sup> For his military service, and for his continued contributions to the field of psychiatry, Dr. McNeel is remembered as a renowned figure within the history of modern psychiatry in Canada.<sup>22</sup>

In its original configuration, most of which has survived to this day, paired with its picturesque setting, the McNeel House exudes a sense of calm. With its sunken living room, built-in furniture, clerestory windows, and sliding, rice paper pocket doors, the home was designed with comfort, serenity, and a sense of security in mind.<sup>23</sup> Paired with its strategic placement upon the Scarborough Bluffs, with a commanding view of Lake Ontario, the McNeel House was an idyllic refuge for one who had spent a career contemplating the ill-effects of mental exhaustion. For those visiting the home as patients, and not houseguests, a separate side entrance opened into Dr. McNeel's study, which included a built-in psychiatrist's couch.<sup>24</sup> The serenity and calm offered by the well-apportioned Modernist home, in concert with its picturesque setting, benefitted homeowner and patient alike. Three decades after the McNeels' departure, the house retains much of its original layout – its exterior appearing to be largely unchanged.

In 2018, the McNeel House was recognized by Heritage Toronto with a historic plaque to the left of the front driveway along Sylvan Avenue (Image 6). The plaque pays respect to the McNeel family and to architect James Murray's use of post-and-beam construction paired with natural materials, including stone and cedar, which are among the central elements of the McNeel House's Modernist design.

### **Architect: James A. Murray**

James Albert Murray (1919-2008) was a Toronto-based architect, professor of architecture, and magazine editor, instrumental in introducing Modern architecture to Canada during the mid-twentieth century. While a student under Eric Arthur within the University of Toronto's architecture program in 1942, Murray began upon a 20-year academic career (Image 7). Murray established himself as an architect within the firm of Cameron, Murray, & Fairfield, which operated in Toronto between 1945 and the mid-1960s. Murray designed dozens of Modernist homes, public buildings, and commercial structures during this time, many of which were clustered in newly developed suburban areas, including several across North York and Don Mills. Murray was also co-founder and long-time editor of *Canadian Architect* magazine (est. 1955) for nearly three

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20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Michael Kaminer. "A Preserved Midcentury-Modern on Lake Ontario." *New York Times*. Feb. 12, 2020. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/12/realestate/house-hunting-in-toronto-an-original-midcentury-modern-for-1-6-million.html>

24 Dave LeBlanc. "Mid-century Modern on the Bluffs." January 25, 2018. Accessed on April 5, 2022 online at: <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/real-estate/toronto/a-mid-century-modern-classic-atop-the-scarborough-bluffs/article37700852/>

decades and used this platform to advance his views on Modern architecture to a new generation of architects (Image 9).

Murray's Modernist style was shaped by his contemporaries, including his mentor Eric Arthur, frequent collaborative partner Henry Fliess, and the vision of acclaimed Modern architects Walter Gropius and Frank Lloyd Wright, whose influence can be seen in many of Murray's best-known works.<sup>25</sup> Murray's aesthetic found a home in new, suburban neighbourhoods in Toronto such as Don Mills, where large swaths of undeveloped land allowed for a bold break from tradition. From large public and private commissions, such as the Murray & Fliess-designed North York Public Library (1959) and the Murray-designed Hugh C. MacLean Publications (1954) headquarters in North York, to his innovative bungalows and split-level plans for Don Mills, Murray's architectural footprint in post-war, suburban Toronto is nearly unmatched (Image 8).<sup>26</sup>

Murray's best-known residential works include the architect's first home at 6 Heathbridge Park (1947) in Bennington Heights, the Shoicet House (1963) at 21 Park Lane Circle in the Bridle Path (Image 10), and the McNeel House (1963) at 125 Sylvan Avenue on the Scarborough Bluffs. The architect's designs are defined by simple geometric lines, broad horizontal planes, and the incorporation of covered carports and walkways – thereby adding an element of functional design to his homes. Echoing fellow Toronto Modernist architects John B. Parkin and John C. Parkin, Murray's preference for horizontal planes owed much to the Prairie School and later International style aesthetic of the early-twentieth century. Murray's common use of covered walkways also referenced the work of renowned Modernist Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>27</sup>

### **iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**

The following section provides an architectural description and analysis related to the property which will establish the basis for determining 'Design and Physical Value' according to O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria.

The property at 125 Sylvan Avenue contains a one-storey house, situated on an irregularly shaped, one-acre lot, backing on to the Scarborough Bluffs. The house is set back from the front lot at an angle to Sylvan Avenue, making it parallel to its side lot lines in a manner consistent with its neighbours, and in response to the lot configuration along the southeast side of Sylvan Avenue between Catalina Drive and Bethune Boulevard (Image 11). The house is arranged as a complex of three distinct and connected one-storey, flat-roofed, rectangular plan structures: the carport, the covered walkway, and the main house. These are arranged orthogonal to each other and at an angle to Sylvan Avenue, with the carport situated closest to the street.

The carport is composed of a close-to square plan with a flat roof supported by an exposed post-and-beam structure and clad in vertical painted wood, tongue-and-groove panels. The street-facing side is open to allow access to the covered parking and is also open on the west side which connects to the adjacent covered walkway (Image 12).

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25 Moiz et al.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

The roof and wood beam structure of the covered walkway are attached to the west facade of the carport. The flat roof over the walkway is visually discernable as a separate architectural element resting on the exposed wood beam structure as it attaches to the carport, and then turns at a right angle and stretches toward the rear of the property and is physically attached to the house at the front entrance. The covered walkway has four exposed post-and-beam bents upon which the flat roof is supported (Image 13). The roof's western edge is aligned to the western edge of the wood structure supporting it, and the roof width is narrower than the beam length, creating a space between the walkway roof and that of the garage, where the beams are exposed.

The main house structure stands at the end of the walkway, forming an open courtyard garden to the left of the walkway, between the house and the carport. Clad in vertical, painted wood, tongue-and-groove panels, it is accessed by a front entryway with an unadorned, orange painted door, centered between two large, fixed-pane side lights at the end of the walkway. The front elevation of the house has no other fenestration except for a window on the eastern end of the facade, divided into four sections, each half arranged in a one-over-two pattern, with large fixed panes of glass on the top, and a lower, small pair of sliding windows.

A flat roof clerestory sits on the roof aligned below with one of its key interior features – the sunken living room (Image 14). The clerestory has windows on two sides, along the front and rear facades (Image 15). A rectangular chimney is centered on the east side of the clerestory and projects up past the height of the roof. The rear wall of the main house, comprised entirely of a glazed fenestration system, is recessed from the edge of the roof, creating a covered area with exposed wood beams. This structural feature constitutes a continuation of the interior beam structural elements which are enclosed on the east and west sides, along with the extended side walls of the house.

Aside from the clerestory windows, which reach the underside of the raised ceiling, the other windows span from the finished floor to the underside of the wood beam structure and are configured as a system of wood mullions, with each section containing large or oversized fixed panes of glass on top, paired with a band of lower panes below, some fixed and some operable. The rear elevation features a glazed wall and glazed door from the master bedroom, and offers unobstructed views from several of the principle rooms within the home of the soft landscaping and vegetation of the back yard atop of the Scarborough Bluffs and beyond to the waters of Lake Ontario (Image 16 & 17).

The east and west elevations are less visible from either the public realm or the front and back yards. These facades include both glazed and unglazed areas, and are consistently clad in the same vertical, wood, tongue-and-groove siding as the rest of the house. The east elevation has a large window, arranged in three large sections which can be read as a continuation of the rear elevation's fenestration, both meeting at the east corner, in similar dimensions to the large system to the rear. The west facade also includes a narrow window in a one-over-one configuration, and one larger window in a two-over-two arrangement. There is a small box window over the kitchen sink which may have been created at a later date. The west elevation has three windows, two narrow ones in a one-over-one configuration, and one larger window in a two-over-two

arrangement. The east elevation has an attached sunroom which is likely a later addition.

From the public realm, given the oblique relationship between the house and the street, the property's front (northwest) elevation facing Sylvan Avenue is defined by a layered view of the three structures: carport/garage, covered walkway, and main house.

#### **iv. CONTEXT**

The following section provides contextual information and analysis related to the property which is the basis for determining 'Contextual Value' according to O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria.

The City of Toronto Property Data Map attached as Image 1 (Attachment 1) shows the location of the subject property at 125 Sylvan Avenue.

The McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue is located southeast of Kingston Road and Markham Road on the south side of Sylvan Avenue between Catalina Drive and Bethune Boulevard. The subject property sits atop the Scarborough Bluffs along the shore of Lake Ontario amid a row of private waterfront homes in the neighbourhood of Scarborough Village. Built by architect James Murray in 1963, the Modernist home is unique among its neighbours for its custom design, many of the homes in the area fitting into the typology of post-war suburban bungalows and split-levels, with a mix of much more recent homes present along the south (waterfront) side of Sylvan Avenue.

Geographically, 125 Sylvan Avenue's position places the home directly above Sylvan Park, one of several waterfront parks along Toronto's eastern shoreline. The historic Guild Inn and Park is located several blocks to the east of the subject property, while Scarborough Village and the adjacent Guildwood neighbourhood are connected via a meandering network of post-war era suburban homes dating to the 1960s. Previously a rural corner of the pre-amalgamated Township of Scarborough, the post-war suburban character of the waterfront neighbourhoods surrounding the subject property speak to the era of relative, middle-class prosperity that characterizes this area following the Second World War.

### **3. EVALUATION AND APPLICATION OF O.REG 9/06 CRITERIA**

The following evaluation applies Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the Ontario Heritage Act: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. The criteria are prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, and the City of Toronto also uses these criteria when assessing properties for inclusion on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register. There are three categories for a total of nine criteria under O. Reg 9/06. A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

The evaluation table is marked "N/A" if the criterion is "not applicable" to the property or "✓" if it is applicable to the property, with explanatory text below.

## DESIGN OR PHYSICAL VALUE

Design or Physical Value	
i. rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	✓
ii. displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	✓
iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement	N/A

*Rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method*

Completed in 1963, the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is valued as a fine and unique example of a custom-designed Mid-Century Modern house in Toronto, showcasing Modernist style residential design ideals adapted to the Canadian context. The Modernist style's emphasis on the understanding of the properties of materials, program needs, and artistic architectural expression achieved through minimal decoration is most evident at 125 Sylvan Avenue in the use and expression of the wooden post-and-beam structural system in the garage and walkway structures, and the inclusion of wood-clad steel in the main house to achieve open plan areas and create a distinction between the structural grid and the other architectural elements (roof, partition walls, hearth, and glazed areas). These concepts respond to the site's specific context at 125 Sylvan Avenue in the composition of solid areas for walls, openings and floor-to-ceiling glazing (in the main house), as well as serving to visually merge the interior and exterior space. This transcending connection between the interior and exterior is particularly evident in the procession of arrival on and across the property by vehicle, pedestrian access under the covered walkway, view of the orange front door, entry into the front foyer and through the rice paper sliding doors, revealing the unobstructed views of Lake Ontario from the principal rooms of the main house.

*Displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit*

The property displays a high degree of artistic merit for the ways in which its custom-designed composition (site planning, form, scale, choice of materials and architectural detailing) adapts Modernist style Canadian residential ideals to the regional level by a Toronto-based architect. The artful distinction of architectural elements expressed using a combination of natural and manufactured materials with minimal detailing for the structure, roof, partition walls, glazed areas, openings and hearth serves to connect the artificial/built structures to their natural setting atop the Scarborough Bluffs and maximize the property's views of Lake Ontario. A high degree of artistic merit is evident in the overall design, which is a thoughtfully balanced minimalistic architectural intervention, as a network of objects in the landscape, including the juxtaposition of the low-slung, one-storey massing and form of the structures expressed in their flat roofs with the dramatic natural environment of the Scarborough Bluffs.

Key aspects of the interior design are highlighted by a creative and sensitive use of natural light using the composition of structural and architectural elements, including the clerestory of windows, sunken living room wood encased steel structural grid, stone fireplace and the rice paper panelled doors.

## HISTORICAL OR ASSOCIATIVE VALUE

Historical or Associative Value	
i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	✓
ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	N/A
iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	✓

*Direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community*

The McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue is valued for its historical association with the life and work of Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel, who along with his wife Helen B. McNeel, commissioned and owned the home from 1963 to 1994. A Second World War veteran whose service during the Allied liberation of Europe focused upon treating soldiers suffering from battle exhaustion and shellshock, Dr. McNeel was a pioneer in the field of modern medicine and mental health. The McNeel's residence and the site of Dr. McNeel's private practice, the home holds a close connection to its original owners.

*Demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community*

The McNeel House also has significant historical value for its direct association with the life and remarkable career of architect James Murray. Murray was a Toronto-based Modernist architect, professor of architecture, and co-founder and long-time editor of Canadian Architect magazine, whose prolific career had an immense impact upon the trajectory of Modern architecture in Canada during the mid-twentieth century.

Murray designed one of Toronto's first Modernist homes for James A. Daly, president of Maclean-Hunter, located at 1 Brendan Road nearby the architect's 1947-built residence at 6 Heathridge Park in Bennington Heights (demolished). Murray designed several custom-built homes, of which the McNeel House is a rare surviving example, using his signature Modernist design cues, including the careful placement of the home in its natural setting, the use of straight lines, the home's broad, horizontal massing, and the inclusion of a prominent covered walkway leading to the front door as also found at the 1963-built Shoicet House at 21 Park Lane Circle in the Bridle Path (demolished).

With award-winning designs for public, commercial, and residential architecture across the city, Murray's work within the post-war, suburban enclaves of North York, Scarborough, and elsewhere, shaped the evolution of Toronto's pre-amalgamation boroughs. Murray won several awards and medals as a student and during his career, including a Royal Architectural Institute of Canada award (1940), British Association for the Advancement of Science award (1942), Massey Silver Medal (1958), Canadian Housing Design Council award (1969), and the Ontario Association of Architect's Order of Da Vinci (1988). A long-time associate with fellow Canadian Modernists John B. Parkin, John C. Parkin, and Henry Fliess, Murray's work within newly developed areas such as Don Mills greatly influenced the evolution of Canadian Modernism.

## CONTEXTUAL VALUE

Contextual Value	
i. important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	✓
ii. physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	✓
iii. landmark	N/A

### *Important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area*

The McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue has contextual value in relation to its role in defining, maintaining, and supporting the post-war, Garden City, character of Scarborough Village. The majority of the first generation of homes in the neighbourhood, built in the 1950s and 1960s, are typical of several related, Modernist, suburban houseform typologies, including bungalows and split-levels. In this way the custom-designed McNeel House reflects many of the core aesthetic qualities shared by its neighbours, its broad, horizontal massing, use of straight lines, materiality, and incorporation of touchstone Modernist elements such as the carport and covered walkway, visually and functionally tying the home to its neighbours.

### *Physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings*

Physically, functionally, and visually, the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue has additional contextual value for its careful placement on top of the Scarborough Bluffs. Situated at an angle to the street, the property is picturesquely nestled onto its lake view lot, allowing it to blend into its natural surroundings.

## CONCLUSION

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Staff have completed the Research and Evaluation Report for the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue and determined that the property meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act under the following criteria: design/physical, associative/historical, and contextual value. As such, the property is a significant built heritage resource.

Known as the McNeel House, the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is valued as a fine and unique example of a custom-designed Modernist style house in Toronto, and for its high degree of artistic merit for the ways in which its custom-designed composition adapts Modernist style Canadian residential ideals to the regional level by a Toronto-based architect. The overall design showcases modernist design ideas in the distinction of the structural grid from other architectural elements, to create a site specific composition that is highly responsive to its location atop the Scarborough Bluffs, artfully revealing unobstructed views of Lake Ontario from within the property.

Designed by the Toronto-based, Modernist architect, James Murray (1919-2008) in the Modernist style, the McNeel House is valued as well for its connection to the life and career of one of Canada's leading figures in Modern architecture. Featuring the use of straight lines, a broad, horizontal massing, post-and-beam construction, and a reliance

upon natural materials, the McNeel House is highly representative of Murray's residential work, and of the Modern style. Further tying the home to Murray is his signature inclusion of an open carport attached to the front entryway of the main house via a covered walkway.

Named for its original owners Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel and Helen B. McNeel, the subject property has associative value for its direct connection to the career of pioneering Canadian psychiatrist Dr. B. H. McNeel. A celebrated psychiatrist and Second World War veteran, Dr. McNeel's research into the treatment of combat troops suffering from battle exhaustion and shellshock had a significant influence upon modern conceptions around mental health among active and decommissioned members of the armed forces. The McNeel House was additionally the site of Dr. McNeel's private practice, with a second entrance to the study – complete with built-in psychiatrist's couch – for patients. Built high atop the Bluffs with an eye towards comfort, calm, and serenity, with its sunken living room, built-in furniture, clerestory windows, and rice-paper doors, the McNeel House was an ideal space for its inhabitants, guests, and patients alike.

Contextually, the McNeel House physically, functionally, and visually supports the post-war, suburban character of Scarborough Village. Developed during the 1960s, and featuring a mix of one- and two-storey bungalows and split-level residences, the defining character of the waterfront district of Scarborough Village is reflective of the Modernist style, materiality, and aesthetic of the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue.

The Statement of Significance (Attachment 3) 125 Sylvan Avenue, comprises the Reasons for Designation, which is the Public Notice of Intention to Designate.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Gregg Lintern, MCIP, RPP  
Chief Planner and Executive Director  
City Planning

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1 – Maps and Photographs

Attachment 2 – List of Research Sources

Attachment 3 – Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation) 125 Sylvan Avenue

**MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:  
125 SYLVAN AVENUE**

**ATTACHMENT 1**



Image 1. This location map is for information purposes only; the exact boundary of the property is not shown. The red box marks the location of the site. (City of Toronto iView Mapping).



Image 2. 1939 aerial view of the future site of 125 Sylvan Avenue (indicated in red).



Image 3. 1954 aerial view of the former Boynton Estate (indicated in red with black line showing future subdivision of the double lot) upon the future site of 125 Sylvan Avenue.



Image 4. 1965 aerial view of the recently completed McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue (indicated in red).



Image 5. 125 Sylvan Avenue, Heritage Toronto (2018) plaque paying tribute to the McNeel House and its architect James Murray, Sutton Realty Inc., 2021.



Image 6. Dr. McNeel during WWII, by Greg Stevenson. From: Copp, Terry. "Unsung Valour in Normandy." Legion: Canada's Military History Magazine. June 4, 2019.

## BRITISH MEDAL WON BY U. OF T. STUDENT

Receiving the highest marks among 179 students in his year in



**James Murray**

the faculty of applied science and engineering at the University of Toronto. James Murray, fourth year architectural student, has been awarded a medal by the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1940 he won the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada competition, open to the whole country, and he has won an Ontario Architectural association scholarship given by the university. Murray is a son of Dr. F. W. Murray, Carlton St.

the faculty of applied science and engineering at the University of Toronto. James Murray, fourth year architectural student, has been awarded a medal by the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1940 he won the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada competition, open to the whole country, and he has won an Ontario Architectural association scholarship given by the university. Murray is a son of Dr. F. W. Murray, Carlton St.

Image 7. May 12, 1942 Toronto Daily Star article featuring a young James Murray during his time as a promising architecture student at the University of Toronto.



Image 8. Jury for the 1969 Canadian Architect Awards of Excellence. Canadian Architect magazine's founding editor James Murray (centre-left; pointing), associate editor Patricia Gillespie (top), managing editor Robert Gretton (top-right); with Victor Prus of Montreal (far-left) and Jerome Markson of Toronto (far-right). From: Lam, Elsa. "Celebrating 60 Years." Canadian Architect. August 1, 2015.



*Architect, James Murray*

*Builder, Greenwin Construction Company*

Image 9. Collection of three Murray-designed homes in Don Mills, 1954. From: Hancock, Macklin L and Douglas H. Lee. "Don Mills New Town." JRAIC. No. 1, Vol. 31 (January 1954). 3-27.



Image 10. Covered walkway, Shoicet House (1963) at 21 Park Lane Circle prior to its demolition in 2016. From: LeBlanc, Dave. "Drake, take one last dance with that Bridle Path home before tearing it down." Globe and Mail. May 26, 2016.



Image 11. 125 Sylvan Avenue (looking south to Lake Ontario), Google Maps.



Image 12. 125 Sylvan Avenue, carport connected via the covered walkway to the front entryway of the main house, Sutton Realty Inc., 2021.



Image 13. 125 Sylvan Avenue, walkway and front door, Sutton Realty Inc., 2021.



Image 14. 125 Sylvan Avenue, sunken living room with central hearth, built-in seating and side tables, pop-up clerestory, and rice paper panelled doors, Sutton Realty Inc., 2021.



Image 15. 125 Sylvan Avenue, sunken living room, looking south to Lake Ontario. From: Kaminer, Michael. "A Preserved Midcentury-Modern on Lake Ontario." New York Times. February 12, 2020.



Image 16. Sylvan Avenue, rear elevation, with floor-to-ceiling glazing, Sutton Realty Inc., 2021.



Image 17. 125 Sylvan Avenue, looking south from the back yard over the Scarborough Bluffs to Lake Ontario, Sutton Realty Inc., 2021.



Image 18. 125 Sylvan Avenue, front entryway with sliding pocket doors with rice paper panels, Sutton Realty Inc. 2021.

**LIST OF RESEARCH SOURCES:  
125 SYLVAN AVENUE**

**ATTACHMENT 2**

**Archival Sources:**

- City of Toronto Archives, Photographic Collection
- City of Toronto Building Records – Scarborough
- City of Toronto Directories
- Goad's Historical Atlas Maps
- Ontario Land Registry Records, PLAN 2235 PT LOT 116 PT LOT 117
- Toronto Public Library, Photographic Collection

**Secondary Sources:**

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**125 SYLVAN AVENUE****MCNEEL HOUSE****(REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)**

The property at 125 Sylvan Avenue 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/physical, associative/historical, and contextual values.

**Description**

The property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is situated southeast of Kingston Road and Markham Road in Scarborough Village atop of the Scarborough Bluffs. It contains the McNeel House, a one-storey, Mid-Century Modern home constructed in 1963 for Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel and his wife Helen B. McNeel by Modernist architect James Albert Murray (1919-2008). The McNeel House has an expansive view of Lake Ontario from above Sylvan Park, which spans the bottom of the Bluffs below a row of homes.

In 2018, the McNeel House was recognized by Heritage Toronto with a historic plaque to the left of the front driveway along Sylvan Avenue. The plaque pays respect to the McNeel family and to architect James Murray's use of post-and-beam construction paired with natural materials, including stone and cedar, which are among the central elements of the McNeel House's Modernist design.

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

Completed in 1963, the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is valued as a fine and unique example of a custom-designed Mid-Century Modern house in Toronto, showcasing Modernist style residential design ideals adapted to the Canadian context. The Modernist style's emphasis on the understanding of the properties of materials, program needs, and artistic architectural expression achieved through minimal decoration is most evident at 125 Sylvan Avenue in the use and expression of the wooden post-and-beam structural system in the garage and walkway structures, and the inclusion of wood-clad steel in the main house to achieve open plan areas and create a distinction between the structural grid and the other architectural elements (roof, partition walls, hearth, and glazed areas). These concepts respond to the site's specific context at 125 Sylvan Avenue in the composition of solid areas for walls, openings and floor-to-ceiling glazing (in the main house), as well as serving to visually merge the interior and exterior space. This transcending connection between the interior and exterior is particularly evident in the procession of arrival on and across the property by vehicle, pedestrian access under the covered walkway, view of the orange front door, entry into the front foyer and through the Japanese Shōji, rice paper sliding doors, revealing the unobstructed views of Lake Ontario from the principal rooms of the main house.

The property displays a high degree of artistic merit for the ways in which its custom-designed composition (site planning, form, scale, choice of materials and architectural detailing) adapts Modernist style Canadian residential ideals further, to the regional level by a Toronto-based architect. The artful distinction of architectural elements expressed using a combination of natural and manufactured materials with minimal detailing for the structure, roof, partition walls, glazed areas, openings and hearth serves to connect the artificial/built structures to their natural setting atop the Scarborough Bluffs and maximize the property's views of Lake Ontario. A high degree of artistic merit is evident in the overall design, which is a thoughtfully balanced minimalistic architectural intervention, as a network of objects in the landscape including the juxtaposition of the low-slung, one-storey massing and form of the structures expressed in their flat roofs with the dramatic natural environment of the Scarborough Bluffs.

Key aspects of the interior design are highlighted by a creative and sensitive use of natural light using the composition of structural and architectural elements, including the clerestory of windows, sunken living room, wood encased steel structural grid, stone fireplace and the rice paper panelled doors

### **Associative and Historical Value**

The McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue is valued for its historical association with the life and work of Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel, who along with his wife Helen B. McNeel, commissioned and owned the home from 1963 to 1994. A Second World War veteran whose service during the Allied liberation of Europe focused upon treating soldiers suffering from battle exhaustion and shellshock, Dr. McNeel was a pioneer in the field of modern medicine and mental health. The McNeel's residence and the site of Dr. McNeel's private practice, the home holds a close connection to its original owners.

The McNeel House also has significant historical value for its direct association with the life and remarkable career of architect James Murray. Murray was a Toronto-based Modernist architect, professor of architecture, and co-founder and long-time editor of Canadian Architect magazine, whose prolific career had an immense impact upon the trajectory of Modern architecture in Canada during the mid-twentieth century.

Murray designed one of Toronto's first Modernist homes for James A. Daly, president of Maclean-Hunter, located at 1 Brendan Road nearby the architect's 1947-built residence at 6 Heathridge Park in Bennington Heights (demolished). Murray designed several custom-built homes, of which the McNeel House is a rare surviving example, using his signature Modernist design cues, including the careful placement of the home in its natural setting, the use of straight lines, the home's broad, horizontal massing, and the inclusion of a prominent covered walkway leading to the front door as also found at the 1963-built Shoicet House at 21 Park Lane Circle in the Bridle Path (demolished).

With award-winning designs for public, commercial, and residential architecture across the city, Murray's work within the post-war, suburban enclaves of North York, Scarborough, and elsewhere, shaped the evolution of Toronto's pre-amalgamation boroughs. Murray won several awards and medals as a student and during his career,

including a Royal Architectural Institute of Canada award (1940), British Association for the Advancement of Science award (1942), Massey Silver Medal (1958), Canadian Housing Design Council award (1969), and the Ontario Association of Architect's Order of Da Vinci (1988). A long-time associate with fellow Canadian Modernists John B. Parkin, John C. Parkin, and Henry Fliess, Murray's work within newly developed areas such as Don Mills greatly influenced the evolution of Canadian Modernism.

## **Contextual Value**

The McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue has contextual value in relation to its role in defining, maintaining, and supporting the post-war, Garden City, character of Scarborough Village. The majority of the first generation of homes in the neighbourhood, built in the 1950s and '60s, are typical of several related, Modernist, suburban house- form typologies, including bungalows and split-levels. To these ends, the custom-designed McNeel House reflects many of the core aesthetic qualities shared by its neighbours, its broad, horizontal massing, use of straight lines, materiality, and incorporation of touchstone Modernist elements such as the carport and covered walkway, visually and functionally tying the home to its neighbours.

Physically, functionally, and visually, the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue has additional contextual value for its careful placement atop the Scarborough Bluffs. Situated at an angle to the street, the property is picturesquely nestled onto its lake view lot, allowing it to blend into its natural surroundings.

## **Heritage Attributes**

### **Design and Physical Value**

Attributes that contribute to the design and physical cultural heritage value of the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue:

#### Site Plan:

- Location and orientation of the detached house with respect to the Scarborough Bluffs and Sylvan Avenue
- Orthogonal relationship of the three distinct and connected structures or elements, designated as garage/carport, walkway, and main house
- Open courtyard between the garage/carport, covered walkway, and main house

#### Scale, Form, and Massing:

- One-storey, low-slung, flat roof, square and/or rectangular plans for the carport/garage, walkway, and main house structures
- Pop-up clerestory and its location on the roof and relationship with the interior sunken living room.

#### Garage/Car Port:

- Flat roof structure enclosed on three sides, open on the elevation facing Sylvan Avenue and open bay on the west facade
- Exposed, unadorned, rectilinear, (painted) wood post-and-beam structure
- Vertical tongue-and-groove painted wood cladding to match the main house

- Horizontal recessed band distinguishing the roof plane from the exterior walls

#### Walkway connecting main house to garage:

- Flat roof the width of the recessed front entrance alcove
- Metal flashing along roof fascia
- Exposed, unadorned, rectilinear, (painted) wood post-and-beam structure
- Exposed wood tongue-and-groove ceiling
- Space between the roof and the garage
- Paved walkway

#### Main House:

- Recessed front door alcove the width of which directly matches that of the walkway roof
- Location and style of the orange painted front door, centered within two fixed-pane sidelights, with interior painted wood mullions acting as visual screens
- Japanese-inspired pocket sliding doors with rice paper panels in the interior between the entry hall and living room
- Steel post-and-beam frame structure encased in wood or other cladding material in the exterior
- Interior beams that connect to the exterior, blurring the line between indoor and outdoor space
- Facade composition; areas of the facade dedicated to glazing, and areas of the facade dedicated to walls
- Floor-to-ceiling fenestration, in particular but not limited to, along the southern facade facing the Scarborough Bluffs that provide a visual connection from the interior to the exterior
- Vertical, wood, tongue-and-groove cladding, from grade to recessed horizontal band, emphasizing the separation of roof and wall
- Flat roof design with metal flashed fascia
- Pop-up clerestory with a flat roof and its location centered on and along the perimeter of the sunken living room below, with windows located along two sides (facing south to the Bluffs and north to the front of the house) with regularly spaced mullions
- Japanese Shōji, pocket sliding doors from the foyer into the sunken living room
- Sunken living room, with Modernist style built-in wood seating lining three sides and teak wood cubic corner elements serving as end tables
- Rusticated stone wall containing fireplace, facing sunken living room, laid on a coursed random bond
- Cedar wood tongue-and-groove exposed ceilings
- Wood window mullions and doors, which in the interior adjacent to the rear covered area, are coordinated to match the tongue-and-groove ceiling, particularly in colour
- View of Lake Ontario from the interior and entry of the sunken living room and through rear glazed wall

### **Associative and Historical Value**

Attributes that contribute to the associative and historical cultural heritage value of the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue:

- The inclusion of a separate entrance for Dr. McNeel's private practice, which led patients to the doctor's study complete with built-in psychiatrist's couch.
- The historical association with the work of Toronto-based Modernist architect James Murray, whose signature use of carports, covered walkways, broad, horizontal planes, and natural light are reflected by the subject property.

### **Contextual Value**

Attributes that contribute to the contextual cultural heritage value of the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue:

- The picturesque placement of the subject property and all of its component parts – carport, covered walkway, and main house – atop the Scarborough Bluffs in such a way that complements the natural features of the waterfront, cliff-side lot.