



Centre Canadien d'Architecture
Bureau du directeur fondateur émérite

Canadian Centre for Architecture
Office of the Founding Director Emeritus

1920, rue Baile
Montréal, Québec
Canada H3H 2S6
t 514 939 7025
f 514 939 7020

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President and Members of the Toronto Heritage Preservation Board
hertpb@toronto.ca

Re: Heritage protection for the Basilian Seminary at 95 St Joseph Street, Toronto

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Toronto Preservation Board:

I applaud the Toronto Heritage Preservation Board for unanimously passing the motion of intention to designate the Basilian Seminary at 95 St Joseph St, Toronto for protection under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

This decision is manifestly correct and based on the well-researched report by Heritage Planning staff dated January 4, 2022. I note the high level of community support for the motion, including Architectural Conservancy Ontario, as well as from my own organization, the Canadian Centre for Architecture. The designation must demonstrate to the engaged community that it has meaning, and lead to robust preservation of this important assemblage of buildings within its unique heritage landscape.

At the meeting of January 24, 2022, the developer expressed the view that their current development application addresses all heritage concerns, and therefore would not require any further changes as a result of Level IV protection. I respectfully disagree and believe that the most recently submitted development proposal is *not* an improvement in any substantive way over previous, unacceptable versions.

My previous submission, the Staff Report for Action, and the Toronto Heritage Preservation Board all agree that the seminary building, St Joseph Street and the University of St Michaels College campus form part of an acknowledged cultural heritage landscape. Viewed through that cultural heritage lens, I must reflect further upon issues raised in my previous letters of September 22, 2019 and January 18, 2022.

I continue to have serious concerns with the development proposal, the amount of the building being demolished, and the nature of the replacement structure. The height and massing proposed at the 95 St Joseph Street site is fundamentally inappropriate. No amount of “sculpting” of the tall tower changes this. By virtue of its height, it disrupts the streetscape, it overwhelms the campus and casts an unacceptable shadow. This shadow would progress across the green spaces, affect other heritage buildings such as those on Elmsley Place, and coincide with the Spring and Fall semesters for St Michaels University College students. While there exist precedents in Toronto where tall buildings have been built atop heritage buildings, this is no reason to permit this here. Heritage Planning’s staff report demonstrates that the site is part of a cultural heritage landscape of major significance.

In my previous letter I wrote that the total depth of the North Wing, and its connection to the chapel, must be retained. The previous development proposal maintained the chapel in situ, though disconnected from the North Wing. The current proposal further disconnects the chapel and goes on to move it to the northwest corner of the proposed building and encase it within the structure. The beautiful stained-glass windows would no longer receive natural light.

This important building represents one of only three works in Toronto of Ernest Cormier, Canada’s most distinguished architect of the twentieth century. It is disturbing that the preservation the developer proposes for the seminary amounts to mere facadism. The loss of the Newman Chapel would be equally upsetting. This makes a mockery of Heritage Conservation Strategy. I cannot emphasize enough the contribution of this four-storey complex within St. Michael's College towards humanizing this corner of the campus.

Currently the proposed development plan destroys much of the heritage that you are intending to designate with this highest possible level of protection. Instead, this is an opportunity to shed the inadmissible approach of facadism. I urge you all to ensure that the Amendments Report on the development proposal at 95 St Joseph Street includes protection for the volume of the building and its chapels. The property owners should be encouraged to repurpose it appropriately.

Sincerely,



Phyllis Lambert, CC, GOQ, CAL, FRAIC
Founding Director Emeritus

Cc: Members of the Toronto Planning and Housing Committee
Mary MacDonald, Senior Manager, Heritage Planning
Tamara Anson-Cartwright, Program Manager, Policy and Research,
Heritage Planning
Anne Fisher, Program Manager, Development Review, Heritage Planning
Kristen Flood, Heritage Planner, Development Review, Heritage Planning
Marybeth McTeague, Heritage Planner, City Planning/Heritage
Leontine Major, Senior Planner, City Planning Department
Councillor Mike Layton, Office of Ward 13, Toronto City Council
Emily Wong, Advisor, Community Engagement and Planning, Office of
Councillor Layton