

625 Yonge Street – Proposed Designation By-law Under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act - Consideration of Objections

Date: December 6, 2022

To: City Council

From: Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: Ward 13 - Toronto Centre

SUMMARY

This report recommends that Council affirm its decision of August 15, 2022 (Item CC48.3) stating its intention to designate the property at 625 Yonge Street (including active entrances at 621, 627, 629, 631, 633, 635, and 637 Yonge Street, and 1, 3, and 5 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The City has received an objection to the notice of intention to designate on behalf of the property owner within the statutory timeline.

The subject property at 625 Yonge Street consists of two adjoining buildings on the southeast corner of Yonge Street and Isabella Street. Architecturally and historically interrelated, the two buildings at 625 Yonge Street constitute a representative example of Edwardian Classicist-style commercial main street buildings. Part of Yonge Street's historic commercial streetscape since the early 20th century, the property maintained a long association with the automotive industry, beginning with its original use for Thomas Crow's carriage business. City Council included the subject property on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register in 2016. It is also a contributing property within the Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District (HCD), which was enacted by City Council in 2016 and is currently under appeal.

Staff have reviewed the objections raised by the owner and are of the opinion that despite these objections, the property meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, under all three categories of design/physical, historical/associative, and contextual values.

As the property has cultural heritage value or interest and meets the prescribed criteria pursuant to Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, this property should be designated. Designation enables Council to review proposed alterations for the property, enforce heritage property standards and maintenance, and refuse demolition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council affirm its decision to state its intention to designate the property at 625 Yonge Street (including active entrances at 621, 627, 629, 631, 633, 635, and 637 Yonge Street, and 1, 3, and 5 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act as set out in Council Decision CC48.3 on August 15, 2022.
2. City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the Bill in Council designating the property at 625 Yonge Street (including active entrances at 621, 627, 629, 631, 633, 635, and 637 Yonge Street, and 1, 3, and 5 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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

DECISION HISTORY

On August 15, 2022, Council stated its intention to designate the property at 625 Yonge Street (including active entrances at 621, 627, 629, 631, 633, 635, and 637 Yonge Street, and 1, 3, and 5 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.CC48.3>

BACKGROUND

Council has stated its intention to designate the property at 625 Yonge Street (including active entrances at 621, 627, 629, 631, 633, 635, and 637 Yonge Street, and 1, 3, and 5 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act (the Act). Notice of Council's intention to Designate was served on the property owners and the Ontario Heritage Trust, and was published in accordance with the Act. The objection period ended on September 19, 2022.

A notice of objection was received by the City Clerk on behalf of the owners of the property within the required timeframe set out in the Act. The Act requires that Council consider and make a decision on an objection within 90 days from the end of the objection period, subject to any permitted exceptions under the Act. Council may decide to withdraw, amend, or affirm its intention to designate.

COMMENTS

Staff have reviewed the notice of objection dated September 9, 2022, and prepared by Devine Park LLP. The notice of objection is included as Attachment 1 to this report. Through this letter the owners outline a number of reasons for their objection.

The owners have expressed the opinion that the notice of intention to designate "fails to appropriately assess the existing conditions of the buildings on the property, and ascribes undue significance to their design value when in actual fact, they were (as noted in the original assessment) relatively generic and functional for their time, and not unique in style, design, materials or construction methods."

Staff have re-examined the Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation) for the property at 625 Yonge Street and remain of the opinion that the extent of the Statement of Cultural Heritage Value and the Heritage Attributes appropriately describe the cultural heritage value or interest of this property as it relates to the criteria prescribed by Ontario Regulation 9/06 of the Act. Staff do not recommend revisions to the extent of this statement. The Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation) adopted by Council is appended to this report as Attachment 2.

In the opinion of Heritage Planning staff, the property's two adjoining buildings constitute a representative example of Edwardian Classicist-style commercial main street buildings. The property is directly associated with the theme of early-twentieth-century commercial development along Yonge Street. Specifically, from construction in c.1905-1907 (631-637 Yonge Street/1-5 Isabella Street) and c.1913-1921 (625-629 Yonge Street) until the early 1950s, the property maintained its association with the automotive industry.

Additionally, the property holds associations with a series of clubs that served the LGBTQ2S+ community, notably including the Domino Club and Komrads in the 1980s. As a longstanding venue that reflected the prevalence of LGBTQ2S+ establishments along Yonge Street and remained connected to the community after it shifted eastward to the Church and Wellesley neighbourhood, the building has the potential to yield information that contributes to an understanding of Toronto's LGBTQ2S+ history. As part of Yonge Street's historic commercial streetscape since the early 20th century, with connections to concentrations of automotive companies and later LGBTQ2S+ establishments, the property is physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to its surroundings.

The objection letter asserts that "the City effectively agreed that the Property did not hold sufficient cultural value as to merit retention" through accepting a prior settlement on part of the lands. There is no record of Council stating this position, nor has Council considered a demolition application to determine that the property ought to be demolished. The Memorandum of Oral Decision of the former Ontario Municipal Board dated January 23, 2015 also did not discuss any heritage matters. That settlement and development application are no longer being pursued.

Also, at the time of the application and the settlement of the prior development, the City's heritage policies through Official Plan Amendment No. 199 remained under appeal before the former Ontario Municipal Board and only came into effect in June 2015.

There is no restriction in the Act or provincial policy documents for City Council to designate a property that has been evaluated to meet the criteria under O. Reg. 9/06. It is also expressly contemplated in O. Reg. 385/21 in light of the new restrictions regarding a prescribed event where designation under the Act is permitted after a matter has been disposed of by the Tribunal.

CONCLUSION

The property at 625 Yonge Street meets Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Act, under all three categories of design/physical, historical/associative, and contextual values. As such, despite the notice of objection, this property should be designated.

CONTACT

Mary L. MacDonald, MA, CAHP
Senior Manager, Heritage Planning
Urban Design, City Planning
Tel: 416-338-1079; Fax: 416-392-1973
E-mail: Mary.MacDonald@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

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

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Letter of Objection – 625 Yonge Street
Attachment 2 – Statement of Significance – 625 Yonge Street
Attachment 3 - Photograph - 625 Yonge Street

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE
(REASONS FOR DESIGNATION)
625 YONGE STREET**

ATTACHMENT 2

The property at 625 Yonge 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 categories of design/physical value, historical/associative value, and contextual value.

Description

The subject property consists of two adjoining buildings that are related historically and architecturally: a northern building at 631-637 Yonge Street/1-5 Isabella Street, and a southern building at 625-629 Yonge Street. Together, they are known municipally as 625 Yonge Street. Located on the southeast corner of Yonge Street and Isabella Street, the brick buildings are three storeys with a flat roof. The west and north elevations can be viewed together from the intersection. With the delineated bays along its front elevation, the property is consistent with the rhythm produced by fine-grained building frontages along the surrounding historic commercial streetscape. The buildings' Edwardian Classicist style is one of several architectural styles that predominate in the area.

It was included on the City's Heritage Register in 2016. The property is identified as a contributing property in the Historic Yonge Street Heritage Conservation District, adopted by City Council in 2016 and currently under appeal.

Statement of Cultural Heritage Value

The property consists of two adjoining buildings that constitute a representative example of Edwardian Classicist-style commercial main street buildings. Although the northern building predates the southern, they share their brick construction and the datum lines of their common floor levels and banding details, and read as an integrated whole. Designed by J. Wilson Gray, the northern building (631-637 Yonge Street/1-5 Isabella Street) retains quoins and exaggerated voussoir details above round-arched window openings on the upper storey of each elevation's corner bay. Both elevations also feature segmentally arched lintels at the third storey, and stone banding above the second and third storeys, with the latter giving the appearance of a simple cornice. The southern building (625-629 Yonge Street), likely designed by Chapman & McGiffin, has a symmetrical composition divided by brick pilasters, large window openings at both the second and third storey, stone sills and banding that continue the lines of the northern building, and a brick parapet with a curving, stepped design. Despite the removal of the original windows, both buildings' original fenestration patterns remain intact.

The property is directly associated with the theme of early-twentieth-century commercial development along Yonge Street. Specifically, from construction in c.1905-1907 (631-637 Yonge Street/1-5 Isabella Street) and c.1913-1921 (625-629 Yonge Street) until the early 1950s, the property maintained its association with the automotive industry. This significant association included the property's original use for Thomas Crow's carriage

business, representing the automotive industry's origins. The property continued to reflect the industry's evolution as it housed the Dominion Automobile Company's showroom, the second store location of Canadian Tire in the 1930s, and other automobile companies until the early 1950s.

Additionally, the property holds associations with a series of clubs that served the LGBTQ2S+ community, notably including the Domino Club and Komrads in the 1980s. As a longstanding venue that reflected the prevalence of LGBTQ2S+ establishments along Yonge Street and remained connected to the community after it shifted eastward to the Church and Wellesley neighbourhood, the building has the potential to yield information that contributes to an understanding of Toronto's LGBTQ2S+ history.

The property is important in maintaining and supporting the historic commercial main street along this portion of Yonge Street, which is characterized by a low-scale continuous streetwall condition. With the delineated bays along its front elevation, the property is consistent with the rhythm produced by fine-grained storefronts along the streetscape. The buildings' Edwardian Classicist style is one of several architectural styles that predominate in the area. As part of Yonge Street's historic commercial streetscape since the early 20th century, with connections to concentrations of automotive companies and later LGBTQ2S+ establishments, the property is physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to its surroundings.

Heritage Attributes

Design and Physical Value

The following heritage attributes contribute to the cultural heritage value of the property at 625 Yonge Street as a pair of Edwardian Classicist-style commercial main street buildings:

- The scale, form, and massing of the property as a three-storey pair of adjoining flat-roofed commercial buildings
- The property's material palette, consisting of brick with stone detailing
- The consistent datum lines of the two buildings' common floor levels and the stone banding details that continue across both buildings, allowing them to be read as an integrated whole
- The northern building's asymmetrical composition with elevations on both Yonge and Isabella streets, including a projecting bay on both elevations that emphasizes the building's corner siting
- The southern building's symmetrical composition with three bays defined by four brick pilasters
- On the northern building, quoins and exaggerated voussoir details above round-arched window openings on the upper storey of each elevation's corner bay
- On the southern building, the brick parapet with a curving, stepped design
- Original fenestration patterns on both buildings, including segmentally arched openings at the third level of the northern building, and large window openings at the second and third storeys of the southern building

Historic and Associative Value

The following heritage attributes contribute to the cultural heritage value of the property at 625 Yonge Street as reflective of the early automotive industry along Yonge Street, and as the former location of a number of venues important to the LGBTQ2S+ community:

- The property's siting and orientation on the east side of Yonge Street and Isabella streets, facing Yonge Street with a strong secondary frontage on Isabella Street
- The property's long elevation along Isabella Street, which was the location of the entrances to the LGBTQ2S+ venues and allows the property to architecturally gesture towards the Church and Wellesley Village to the east
- The scale, form, and massing of the property as a three-storey pair of adjoining commercial buildings, providing it with relatively large floorplates that allowed its historic use as a carriage manufacturer, automobile showroom, and LGBTQ2S+ club space

Contextual Value

The following heritage attributes contribute to the cultural heritage value of the property at 625 Yonge Street as part of Yonge Street's historic commercial streetscape:

- The property's siting and orientation on the east side of Yonge Street and Isabella streets, facing Yonge Street with a strong secondary frontage on Isabella Street
- The scale, form, and massing of the property as a three-storey pair of adjoining commercial buildings
- The property's material palette, consisting of brick with stone detailing
- Delineated bays along the property's front elevation, consistent with the rhythm produced by fine-grained building frontages along the surrounding historic commercial streetscape



West elevation of 625 Yonge Street, facing Yonge; northern building (631-637 Yonge Street/1-5 Isabella Street) at left, and southern building (625-629 Yonge Street) at right (Heritage Planning, 2022).