

125 Sylvan Avenue - Alterations to a Designated Heritage Property and Demolition of Heritage Attributes

Date: September 26, 2024

To: City Council

From: Interim Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning

Wards: Ward 24 - Scarborough-Guildwood

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council approve the alterations proposed for the McNeel House at 125 Sylvan Avenue in connection with a renovation of the subject property. The McNeel House is a one-storey, mid-century modern home constructed in 1963 for Dr. Burdett Harrison McNeel and his wife Helen B. McNeel and designed by modernist architect James Albert Murray (1919-2008).

The proposed alteration involves the demolition of the existing carport, its replacement with a new two-storey garage and the construction of a partial second storey addition above the house that connects to the second storey of the garage through an enclosed link. The proposed alterations conserve the subject heritage property and are consistent with the existing heritage policy framework. The impacts of the application are appropriately mitigated through the overall conservation strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council approve the alterations to the heritage property at 125 Sylvan Avenue, under Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act, to allow for the replacement of the carport with a two-storey garage and the construction of a partial second storey addition above the house on the lands known municipally in 2024 as 125 Sylvan Avenue, with such alterations substantially in accordance with plans and drawings dated July 24, 2024 prepared by E-Architecture Inc. and on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, subject to the following conditions:

- a. That prior to the issuance of any permit for all or any part of the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue, including a heritage permit or a building permit, but

excluding permits for repairs and maintenance and usual and minor works for the existing heritage building as are acceptable to the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, the owner shall:

1. Provide building permit drawings, including a description of materials and finishes, to be prepared by the project architect to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning.
2. Obtain all planning permissions as may be necessary including, but not limited to, obtaining a minor variance.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

City Planning confirms there are no financial implications resulting from the recommendations included in this report in the current budget year or in future years.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

On August 15, 2022, City Council stated 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).
<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2022.CC48.7>

BACKGROUND

Area Context

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 for its custom design. Many of the homes in the area fit 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.

Heritage Value

The property at 125 Sylvan Avenue is designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act (By-law 1231-2022). It 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 and 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 is 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.

Adjacent Heritage Property

No property on the City's Heritage Register is adjacent to the subject site.

Alteration Proposal and Conservation Strategy

The proposed alteration involves the demolition of the existing carport, its replacement with a new two-storey garage and the construction of a partial second storey addition above the house that connects to the second storey of the garage through an enclosed link.

Several interior heritage attributes will be retained in their current state. Attributes being retained will be the sunken living room, fenestrations, interior beams, rusticated stone wall and fireplace, cedar wood tongue-and-groove ceilings are all being conserved. The scope of work will also involve in-kind replacement of deteriorated portions of the existing wood cladding and replacement of the original windows with new windows. Additionally, some exterior beams and posts will be replaced as a result of their state of deterioration and to allow for the construction of the new garage.

Heritage Planning Policy Framework

The Planning Act

The Planning Act guides development in the Province of Ontario. It states that municipalities must have regard for matters of provincial interest. Section 2(d) specifically refers to “the conservation of features of significant architectural, cultural, historical, archaeological or scientific interest” and 2(r) “to a built form that is well designed and provides for a sense of place.”

The Provincial Policy Statement (2020)

The Provincial Policy Statement (2020) (the "PPS") provides policy direction province-wide on land use planning and development to promote strong communities, a strong economy, and a clean and healthy environment. It includes policies on key issues that affect communities, such as:

- the efficient use and management of land and infrastructure
- ensuring the sufficient provision of housing to meet changing needs including affordable housing
- ensuring opportunities for job creation
- ensuring the appropriate transportation, water, sewer and other infrastructure is available to accommodate current and future needs; and
- protecting people, property and community resources by directing development away from natural or human-made hazards
- conservation of cultural heritage and archaeology

The provincial policy-led planning system recognizes and addresses the complex inter-relationships among environmental, economic and social factors in land use planning. The PPS supports a comprehensive, integrated and long-term approach to planning, and recognizes linkages among policy areas.

The PPS is issued under Section 3 of the [Planning Act](#) and all decisions of Council in respect of the exercise of any authority that affects a planning matter shall be consistent with the PPS. Comments, submissions or advice affecting a planning matter that are provided by Council shall also be consistent with the PPS.

The PPS recognizes and acknowledges the Official Plan as an important document for implementing the policies within the PPS. Policy 4.6 of the PPS states that, "The official plan is the most important vehicle for implementation of this Provincial Policy Statement. Comprehensive, integrated and long-term planning is best achieved through official plans."

Policy 2.6.1 of the PPS directs that “Significant built heritage resources and significant cultural heritage landscapes shall be conserved.” Properties included on the City’s Heritage Register are considered to be significant in this context. “Conserved” is defined in the PPS as “the identification, protection, management and use of built heritage resources in a manner that ensures their cultural heritage value or interest is retained under the Ontario Heritage Act.”

Policy 2.6.3 states that "Planning authorities shall not permit development and site alteration on adjacent lands to protected heritage property except where the proposed development and site alteration has been evaluated and it has been demonstrated that the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property will be conserved."

Provincial Plans

Provincial Plans are intended to be read in their entirety and relevant policies are to be applied to each situation. The policies of the Plans represent minimum standards. Council may go beyond these minimum standards to address matters of local importance, unless doing so would conflict with any policies of the Plans.

All decisions of Council in respect of the exercise of any authority that affects a planning matter shall be consistent with the PPS and shall conform with Provincial Plans. All comments, submissions or advice affecting a planning matter that are provided by Council shall also be consistent with the PPS and conform with Provincial Plans.

Toronto Official Plan

This application has been reviewed against the policies of the City of Toronto Official Plan. The Plan provides the policy framework for heritage conservation in the City. The following Official Plan policies apply to the proposed alterations:

3.1.5.4: "Properties on the 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."

3.1.5.5: "Proposed alterations, development, and/or public works on or adjacent to, a property on the Heritage Register will ensure that the integrity of the heritage property's cultural heritage value and attributes will be retained, prior to work commencing on the property and to the satisfaction of the City."

3.1.5.26: "New construction on, or adjacent to, a property on the Heritage Register will be designed to conserve the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of that property and to mitigate visual and physical impact on it."

3.1.5.27: "Where it is supported by the cultural heritage values and attributes of a property on the Heritage Register, the conservation of whole or substantial portions of buildings, structures and landscapes on those properties is desirable and encouraged. The retention of façades alone is discouraged."

The City of Toronto Official Plan can be found here: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/planning-development/official-plan-guidelines/official-plan/>

Standards and Guidelines

The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada (the "Standards and Guidelines") is the official document guiding planning, stewardship and the conservation approach for all listed and designated heritage resources within the

City of Toronto. The General Standards (1-9) the Standards for Rehabilitation (10-12), and the Standards for Restoration (13-14) apply to this project.

The Standards and Guidelines can be accessed here:

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

COMMENTS

Alteration Proposal

Heritage Planning staff have worked with the homeowner over the course of many months to refine the design of the proposed two-storey garage and partial second-storey addition to ensure that the alterations conserve the cultural heritage values and attributes of the property. Following these discussions, the volume of the second-storey addition to the house has been significantly reduced, the scale of the new two-storey garage has been reduced, the garage patio was removed, the existing covered walkway between the garage and house was conserved and the guardrail for the rooftop deck above the house was set back from the front wall. These changes to the proposal have reduced the impact of the alteration such that it maintains the legibility of the original design of the McNeel House as seen from the street.

The proposed three-bay, two-storey garage replaces the existing three-bay carport, which is a heritage attribute identified in the Statement of Significance. The existing carport is not large enough to easily accommodate modern cars and it is exposed to the elements. While open carports are a characteristic design element of mid-century modern homes, staff are of the opinion that the heritage impact of this alteration is mitigated by the design of the new garage. The new garage has the same location and orientation as the existing carport and its relationship to the house is maintained. The three bays of the carport are reinterpreted through three garage doors. The rectilinear form and strong horizontal lines of the carport are maintained in the design of the garage. The existing concrete walkway and canopy that connect the carport to the house will be maintained and continue to provide covered access between the two structures.

The partial second-storey addition to the house is above the easternmost portion of the house and is located to minimize its visibility from the street. The most significant view of the house from the street is oblique along the driveway and the western portion of the house is most visible from this perspective. In addition, the second-storey addition will be partially hidden by the new two-storey garage in front. The addition is located to conserve the central flat roof clerestory, a heritage attribute, that is aligned with the sunken living room below. A narrow second-storey link will connect the rooftop addition to the second storey of the garage. The link is located to the east to maintain the separation between the garage and house, ensuring that the two volumes read as separate. The remainder of the roof will be used for a rooftop terrace. The guardrails for the rooftop terrace will be glazed and set back from the front wall of the house to minimize their visibility from the public realm.

Conservation Strategy

The house contains several interior heritage attributes that have been included in the Statement of Significance and which will be conserved. Generally, most heritage attributes will be retained. Examples include the sunken living room, fenestrations, interior beams, rusticated stone wall and fireplace, cedar wood tongue-and-groove ceilings are all being conserved. The conservation of interior heritage attributes within a private residence also mitigates the heritage impact of the proposed alterations. The cladding materials for the new construction will be contemporary and compatible with the vertical, wood, tongue-and-groove cladding of the house and its modernist aesthetic. The scope of work will also involve in-kind replacement of deteriorated portions of the existing wood cladding and replacement of the original windows with new windows. While the windows are original and a heritage attribute of the property, they are deteriorated beyond the point where they could reasonably be repaired. Some exterior beams and posts will be replaced as a result of their state of deterioration and to allow for the construction of the new garage.

CONCLUSION

Heritage Planning staff are supportive of the application to alter the heritage property at 125 Sylvan Avenue, to allow for the demolition of the existing carport, its replacement with a new two-storey garage and the construction of a partial second storey addition above the house that connects to the second storey of the garage through an enclosed link.

Heritage Planning staff support the proposed conservation strategy and are of the opinion that the proposal has been designed to conserve the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of the heritage property. Interior heritage attributes are rare within heritage designations, particularly within residential properties. The proposal conserves and maintains the design intent of both the inside and the outside of this significant heritage property.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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Interim Chief Planner and Executive Director
City Planning

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Location Map

Attachment 2 - Aerial Photograph

Attachment 3 - Photographs

Attachment 4 - Selected Drawings

125 SYLVAN AVENUE



Figure 1: Location of the property at 125 Sylvan Avenue indicated by the red outline. Note: This location map is for information purposes only; the exact boundaries of the property are not shown. North is located at the top of the map. (City of Toronto mapping).

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH
125 SYLVAN AVENUE

ATTACHMENT 2



Figure 2: Aerial photograph showing the current condition of the subject property and its immediate context. (Google Maps, 2022)

PHOTOGRAPHS

ATTACHMENT 3

125 SYLVAN AVENUE



125 Sylvan Avenue, view of the carport, covered walkway and house (Sutton Realty Inc., 2021)



125 Sylvan Avenue, detailed view of the covered walkway (Sutton Realty Inc., 2021)



125 Sylvan Avenue, view from the street along the driveway (Sutton Realty Inc., 2021)



125 Sylvan Avenue, view of the rear elevation of the house (Sutton Realty Inc., 2021)



125 Sylvan Avenue, interior view of the sunken living room with central hearth, built-in seating and side tables, pop-up clerestory, and rice paper panelled doors (Sutton Realty Inc., 2021)

SELECTED DRAWINGS 125 SYLVAN AVENUE

ATTACHMENT 4

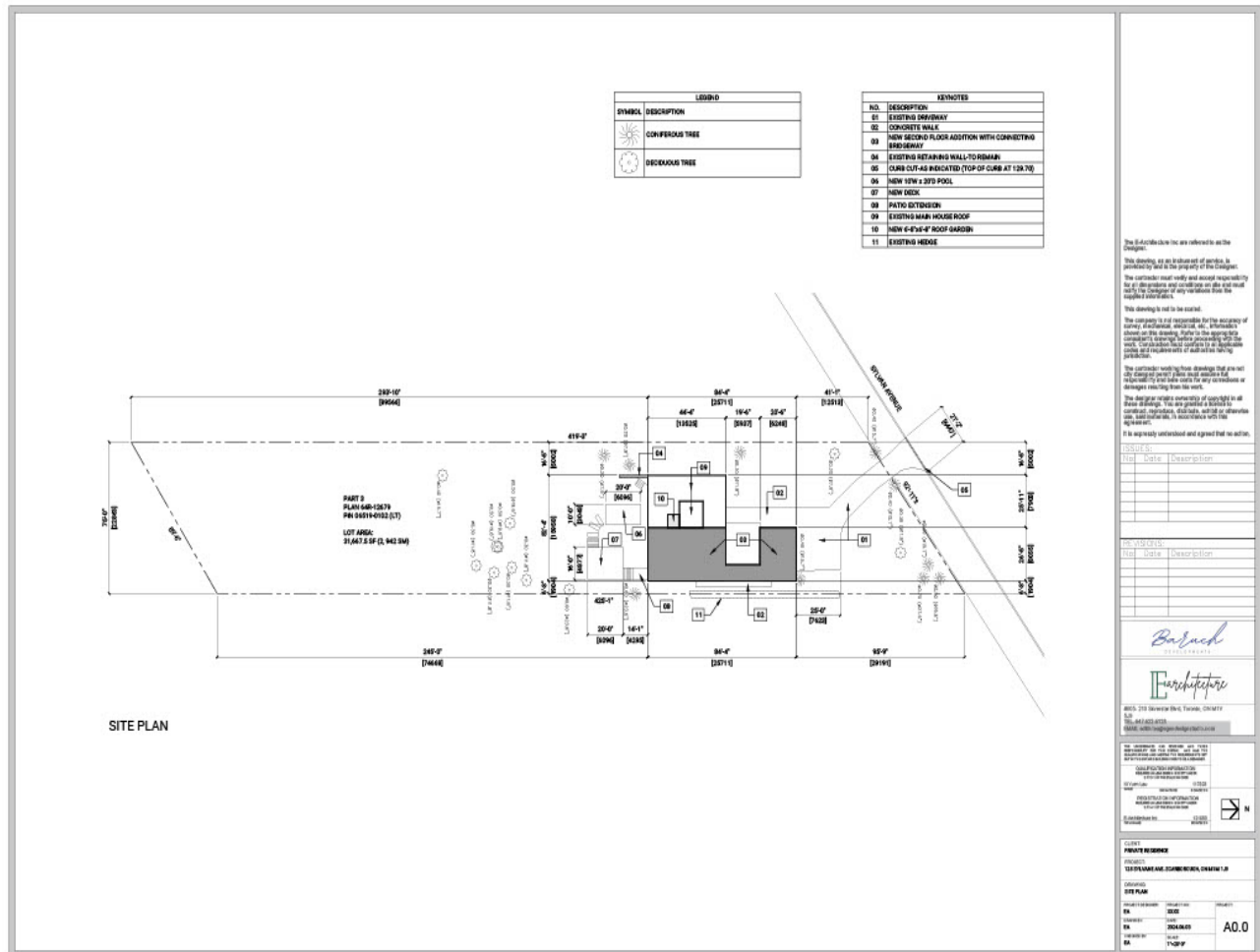
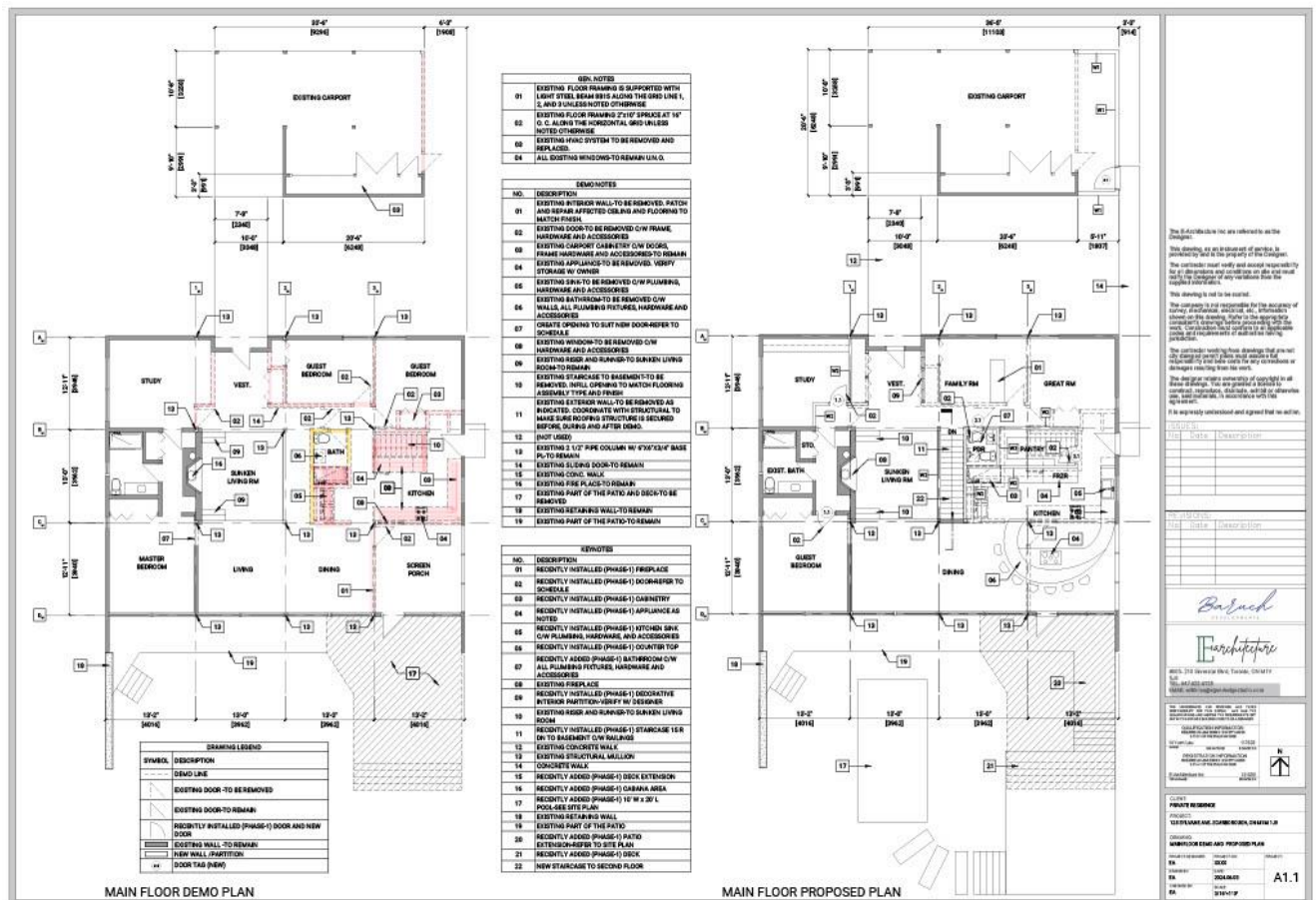
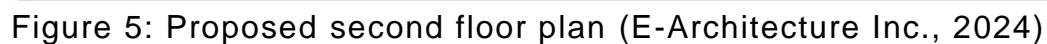


Figure 3: Site Plan (E-Architecture Inc., 2024).





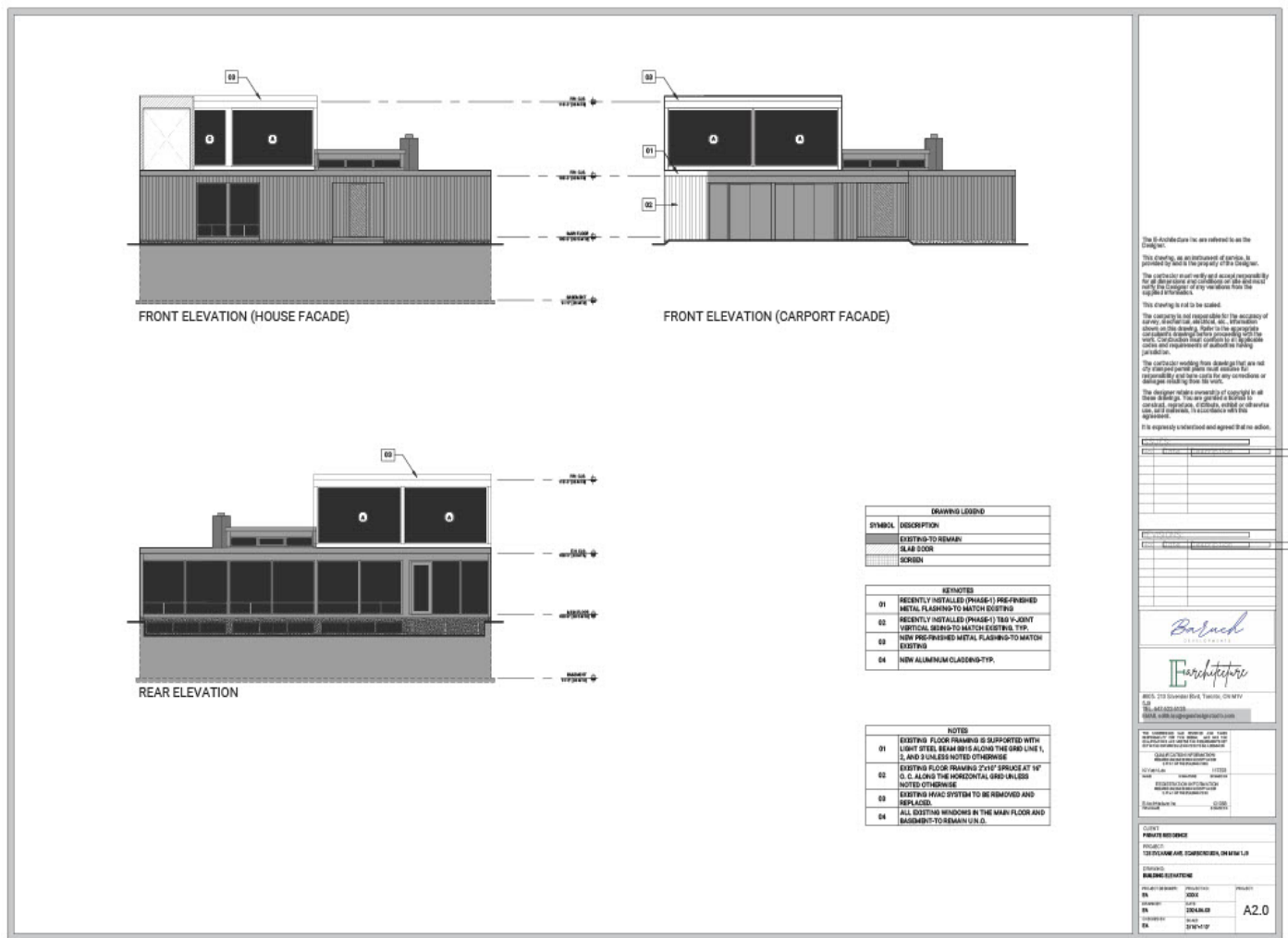


Figure 6: North and South Elevation Drawings (E- Architecture Inc., 2024).





Rendering (E-Architecture Inc., 2022)