

## **81 Isabella Street - Notice of Intention to Designate a Property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act**

**Date:** July 7, 2025

**To:** City Council

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

**Wards:** Ward 13 - Toronto Centre

### **SUMMARY**

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This report recommends that City Council state its intention to designate the property at 81 Isabella Street (including entrance address 83 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value according to the Statement of Significance, which includes a description of heritage attributes, found in Attachment 1.

The subject property at 81 Isabella Street is located on the south side of Isabella Street between Church Street and Jarvis Street in the Church-Wellesley neighbourhood. A location map and current photograph of the heritage property is found in Attachment 2.

The property at 81 Isabella Street contains a two-storey apartment building with raised basement constructed in 1927, known as the Merlan Apartments. It was designed by the architect Norman Alexander Armstrong in the Period Revival style with Edwardian influences. The Merlan Apartments represents one of Armstrong's first designs in the multi-residential walk-up apartment typology. He subsequently designed the Mayfair Apartments (1928), the Haddon Hall Apartments (1928), and the St. Edmunds Apartments (1929-1930) and several notable single-family residences and commercial properties that are designated under the Ontario Heritage Act or are included on the heritage registers in municipalities located in southern Ontario such as Oakville, Oshawa, Brampton, Brantford and London.

81 Isabella Street was listed on the City's Heritage Register on December 17, 2024.

Staff have determined that the property at 81 Isabella Street has cultural heritage value. 81 Isabella Street meets 4 of the Ontario Regulation 9/06 criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. A property may be designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, if it meets 2 or more of the 9 criteria.

The City received a Zoning By-law Amendment Application on June 6, 2025 related to the proposed redevelopment of the subject property which also includes the property at 81 Isabella Street. The proposed development would retain a portion of the main façades on the existing listed building at 81 Isabella Street and add the new construction of a sixty-nine (69)-storey tower building with a 3-storey base with lobby, amenity and rental offices at-grade, and residential rental units above.

A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is required for all development applications that affect listed and designated properties to determine how a heritage property is proposed to be conserved. An HIA, prepared by GBCA dated June 2, 2025, has been submitted.

Designation enables 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 81 Isabella Street (including entrance address 83 Isabella Street) under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act in accordance with the Statement of Significance for 81 Isabella Street (Reasons for Designation) included as Attachment 1, to the report, July 7, 2025, 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 Bills in Council designating the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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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**

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In 2013, City Council adopted the Urban Design Guidelines for North Downtown Yonge. The property located at 81 Isabella was identified as having potential heritage value. <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2013/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-61187.pdf>

City Council included the subject property at 81 Isabella Street on the City of Toronto's Heritage Register on December 17, 2024.

## **POLICY AND REGULATION CONSIDERATIONS**

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### **Provincial Plans and Policies**

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

Further, the policies and definitions of the Provincial Planning Statement (2024) identify the Ontario Heritage Act as the primary legislation through which heritage evaluation and heritage conservation will be implemented.

[Provincial Planning Statement, 2024 \(ontario.ca\)](#)

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 two or more of the provincial criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

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

### **Official Plan**

The City of Toronto's Official Plan implements the provincial policy regime and provides policies to guide decision-making within the City. It 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. The Official Plan should be read as a whole to understand its comprehensive and integrative intent as a policy framework for priority setting and decision-making. The Official Plan can be found here:

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

## **COMMENTS**

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### **Evaluation Analysis**

The following evaluation analysis is based on the comprehensive research conducted for the property at 81 Isabella Street (see Attachment 3) and provides the rationale for the recommendations found in this report.

The property at 81 Isabella Street (including entrance address at 83 Isabella Street) meets the following 4 out of 9 criteria:

**The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative, or early example of a style, type, expression, material, or construction method**

The property at 81 Isabella has design and physical value as a representative example of a 1927 apartment building constructed in the Period Revival style with Edwardian influences. Characteristic of the style, the building's principal (north) elevations are symmetrically arranged containing two wings detailed with ornamented window and door openings. The principal (north) elevations of the wings have a dignified rusticated base, which follows with rugg brick, a quoined section located at the first and second storeys, then topped by a cornice and brick parapet (currently overclad with flashing). Other defining classical elements include the twin main entrance doorway surrounds with their pilasters and entablatures, a limestone belt course that separates the ground floor from the upper levels, and limestone block quoining defining the outer perimeter of the twin principal (north) elevations.

**The property has historical value or associative value because it yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture**

The property has historical value for recalling the socio-economic and development history of the Church-Wellesley Village, surviving as a part of a collection of remaining apartment residences in the area. The property serves as defining a role in the historic transition of the Church-Wellesley Village neighbourhood in the first few decades of the 20th-century from an area of single-family residences to a zone containing a concentration of nearly forty extant apartment houses between Bay, Bloor, Carlton, and Sherbourne Streets. Due to the area's proximity to downtown, it was one of the first areas of the city to be redeveloped into an area dominated by apartment buildings. By the mid-1900s, many early 20th-century house-form buildings in the area had become rentals, boarding houses, and some were replaced by apartment buildings, attracting single people who would come to define the demographic make-up of the Church-Wellesley Village.

**The property has historical value or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer, or theorist who is significant to a community**

The property is also valued for its association with the architect Norman Alexander Armstrong, who designed the Period Revival style building with Edwardian influences. Armstrong started his architecture firm in 1919 and completed a variety of projects that included apartment buildings, commercial and retail operations, and single-family residences. The Merlan Apartments at 81 Isabella Street represents one of his first designs in the multi-residential walk-up apartment typology. Armstrong subsequently designed the Mayfair Apartments (1928), the Haddon Hall Apartments (1928), and the St. Edmunds Apartments (1929-1930).

**The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining, or supporting the character of an area**

Contextually, the Church-Wellesley Village contains a significant number of early 20th-century apartment houses leading to a distinct and notable concentration of nearly forty buildings in this typology between Bay, Bloor, Carlton, and Sherbourne Streets. The majority of these apartments, generally six storeys or less in height, were developed in the 1920s and early 1930s. On Isabella Street, between Church and Sherbourne Streets, the Merlan Apartments is adjacent to the Aughisto Apartments (built 1917) at 72 Isabella Street, and the Isabella Arms Apartments (built 1926) at 96 Isabella Street that exemplify the concentration of early-20th-century apartment buildings in the Church- Wellesley Village area.

See Attachments 1, 2, and 3 of this report for the Statement of Significance; Location Map and Current Photograph; and Research, Evaluation & Visual Resources pertaining to the property at 81 Isabella Street, as all of these documents are integral to the recommendations made in this staff report.

### **Prescribed Event Status**

As of July 1, 2021, Section 29(1.2) of the Ontario Heritage Act restricts City Council's ability to give notice of its intention to designate a property under the Act to within 90 days of a "Prescribed Event".

A Prescribed Event is a point of time when the application for an Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and/or Draft Plan of Subdivision Application has been deemed complete and the City Clerk provides notice of that complete application to the public in accordance with the Planning Act. The Prescribed Event is not the date a development application is deemed complete or when an application is made to the City. A Prescribed Event, including any prescribed exceptions, are defined under O. Reg 385/21.

If a new or subsequent Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and/or Draft Plan of Subdivision Application is submitted on the same property, the Prescribed Event date is reset to the new date the City Clerk issues notice to the public of the new or subsequent complete application.

As of January 1, 2023, should a property be subject to an Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and/or Draft Plan of Subdivision Application that would trigger a Prescribed Event, the property must be listed in the heritage register prior to the Prescribed Event occurring to designate a property under Section 29(1.2)<sup>1</sup> of the Ontario Heritage Act. This requirement does not apply to a Prescribed Event that has occurred prior to January 1, 2023.

The City received a Zoning By-law Amendment Application on June 6, 2025 related to the proposed redevelopment of the subject property which also includes the property at 81 Isabella Street. The proposed development would retain a portion of the main façades on the existing listed building at 81 Isabella Street and add the new construction of a sixty-nine (69)-storey tower building with a 3-storey base with lobby, amenity and rental offices at-grade, and residential rental units above. City staff are reviewing the application for its completeness at the time of this report.

A Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is required for all development applications that affect listed and designated properties to determine how a heritage property is proposed to be conserved. An HIA, prepared by GBCA dated June 2, 2025, has been submitted.

## **CONCLUSION**

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Staff have determined that the property at 81 Isabella Street meets 4 out of 9 criteria in Ontario Regulation 9/06, the criteria prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. As such, the property merits designation, and staff recommend that the Council support the designation of this property to conserve its cultural heritage value.

The Statement of Significance: 81 Isabella Street (Reasons for Designation), included as Attachment 1 to this report, comprises the Reasons for Designation, which is the Public Notice of Intention to Designate.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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Jason Thorne  
Chief Planner and Executive Director  
City Planning

## **ATTACHMENTS**

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Attachment 1 – 81 Isabella Street Statement of Significance (Reasons for Designation)  
Attachment 2 – Location Map and Current Photograph  
Attachment 3 – Research, Evaluation & Visual Resources