

170 Merton Street - Alterations to a Designated Heritage Property under Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act and Authority to Enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement

Date: November 3, 2025

To: Toronto Preservation Board

Toronto East York Community Council

From: Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning

Wards: Ward 12 - Toronto-St. Paul's

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council approve alterations to the property at 170 Merton Street under Part IV, Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act, in connection with the proposed redevelopment of the site and grant authority to enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement.

The property at 170 Merton Street contains the former Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) building, constructed in 1969. It is a representative example of a distinctive Late Modern style office building designed as the headquarters for the VHA featuring octagonal towers and bays, ribbon windows, concrete brick with distinctive interlocking corners and an integrated exterior space with landscaping. The property is the first purpose-built headquarters for the VHA, an important social-welfare agency founded in Toronto in 1925.

In conjunction with an Official Plan and Zoning Amendment application (25 129087 STE 12 OZ), the redevelopment proposes a 45-storey mixed-use residential building, which includes the retention of a portion of the VHA Building. The terrace of the heritage building is proposed to be used for outdoor amenity space. A full conservation scope is proposed for the retained portion of the heritage building. The new construction has been designed to be compatible with and subordinate to the heritage building. The proposal conserves the heritage property and is consistent with the policy framework. The heritage impacts of the development proposal are appropriately mitigated through the overall conservation strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, Urban Design, City Planning recommends that:

1. City Council approve the application to alter the designated heritage property at 170 Merton Street, with conditions, under Part IV, Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act to allow for the construction of a mixed use development with such alterations substantially in accordance with the plans and drawings dated October 7, 2025 prepared by Turner Fleischer and on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning and the Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by ERA Architects Inc., dated March 7, 2025, revised September 5, 2025, and on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, all subject to and in accordance with the Conservation Plan satisfactory to the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, and subject to the conditions as set out below;

a. that the related site-specific Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendment bringing about the proposed alterations have been enacted by City Council and have come into full force and effect in a form and with content acceptable to City Council, as determined by the Chief Planner and Executive Director, City Planning, in consultation with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;

b. that the owner shall:

1. enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement with the City for the property at 170 Merton Street, substantially in accordance with the plans and drawings dated October 7, 2025, prepared by Turner Fleischer and on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning and the Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by ERA Architects Inc., dated March 7, 2025, revised September 5, 2025, all on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, subject to and in accordance with the Conservation Plan required in Recommendation 1.b.2 below, to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, including execution and registration of such agreement to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor; and

2. provide a detailed Conservation Plan, prepared by a qualified heritage consultant that is substantially in accordance with the conservation strategy set out in the Heritage Impact Assessment for the property at 170 Merton Street to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;

c. that prior to the issuance of any permit for all or any part of the property at 170 Merton Street, 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. have entered into a Heritage Easement Agreement with the City required in Recommendation 1.b.1 above for the property at 170 Merton Street, including registration on title of such agreement, to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor;
 2. have obtained final approval for the necessary Official Plan Amendment and Zoning By-law Amendments, and such Amendments to have come into full force and effect;
 3. provide a Heritage Lighting Plan that describes how the exterior of the heritage property will be sensitively illuminated to enhance its heritage character to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning and thereafter shall implement such a plan to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager Heritage Planning;
 4. provide an Interpretation Plan for the subject property, to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning and thereafter shall implement such plan to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;
 5. provide a detailed Landscape Plan for the subject property, satisfactory to the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;
 6. provide building permit drawings, including notes and specifications for the conservation and protective measures keyed to the approved Conservation Plan required in Recommendation 1.b.2 above, including a description of materials and finishes, to be prepared by the project architect and a qualified heritage consultant to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;
 7. provide a Letter of Credit, including provision for upwards indexing, in a form and amount and from a bank satisfactory to the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, to secure all work included in the approved Conservation Plan and Interpretation Plan; and
- d. prior to the release of the Letter of Credit required in Recommendation 1.c.7 above, the owner shall:
1. provide a letter of substantial completion prepared and signed by a qualified heritage consultant confirming that the required conservation work and the required interpretive work has been completed in accordance with the Conservation and Interpretation Plans and that an appropriate standard of conservation has been maintained, all to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning; and
 2. provide replacement Heritage Easement Agreement photographs to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning.

2. City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the necessary Bill in Council authorizing the entering into of a Heritage Easement Agreement for the property at 170 Merton Street.
3. City Council authorize the City Solicitor and City staff to take all necessary actions to implement City Council's decision.

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 March 26 and 27, 2018, City Council refused the issuance of a demolition permit for the heritage property at 170 Merton Street, in accordance with Section 34 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2018.TE30.14>

City Council at its November 7, 2017, meeting approved a Motion to designate the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The Intention to Designate was appealed on December 11, 2017. This objection was forwarded by the City Clerk for review by the Conservation Review Board.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2017.TE27.21>

BACKGROUND

Heritage Property

The property at 170 Merton Street is located on the north side of Merton Street between Yonge Street and Pailton Crescent in the Davisville neighbourhood and contains a two-and-half storey office building.

Constructed in 1969, the former Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) building has design value as a representative example of a distinctive Late Modern style office building designed as the headquarters for the VHA featuring octagonal towers and bays, ribbon windows, concrete brick with distinctive interlocking corners and an integrated exterior space with landscaping. The property has value as it is the first purpose-built headquarters for the VHA, an important social-welfare agency founded in Toronto in 1925. Designed by the Toronto-based architect Leslie Rebanks, the building is also valued for its association with the W. Garfield Weston Foundation which donated the funds for the property and the building and dedicated it to the memory of Mrs. Reta

Weston. The property has contextual value as it contributes to the post-war character of distinctively designed, low-rise residential, commercial and social agency buildings, which transformed Merton Street from its Victorian industrial beginnings following the completion of the Yonge Street subway line in 1954.

Development Proposal

The associated development application seeks to amend the Official Plan and Zoning By-law to permit a 45-storey mixed-use residential building, which includes the partial retention of the existing heritage building at 170 Merton Street. The terrace of the heritage building is proposed to be used for outdoor amenity space.

Heritage Planning Framework

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 Planning Statement (2024)

The Provincial Planning Statement (2024) (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
- protecting people, property and community resources by directing development away from natural or human-made hazards, and
- 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.

Policy 4.6.1 of the PPS directs that "Protected heritage property, which may contain built heritage resources or cultural heritage landscapes, shall be conserved."
"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.

Policy 4.6.2 states that "Planning authorities shall not permit development and site alteration on lands containing archaeological resources or areas of archaeological potential unless the significant archaeological resources have been conserved."

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.

Provincial Plans are intended to be read in their entirety, and relevant policies are to be applied to each situation.

City of Toronto Official Plan

The Plan provides the policy framework for heritage conservation in the City. Relevant policies include the following:

3.1.6.4 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 as adopted by Council.

3.1.6.5 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. Where a Heritage Impact Assessment is required in Schedule 3 of the Official Plan, it will describe and assess the potential impacts and mitigation strategies for the proposed alteration, development or public work.

3.1.6.26 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.

3.1.6.27 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 facades alone is discouraged.

3.1.6.28 The owner of a designated heritage property will be encouraged to enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement where the City considers additional protection beyond designation desirable due to the location, proposed alteration, and/or the nature of that property.

Parks Canada Standards and Guidelines for Conservation of Historic Places in Canada

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

<http://www.historicplaces.ca/en/pages/standards-normes.aspx>

COMMENTS

Conservation Strategy

The application proposes to partially retain the VHA building in-situ with the new tower stepped back above. The interior floorplates of the heritage building are proposed to be removed, and it is intended to be used as the new residential lobby with the terrace fronting Merton Street, to be used for outdoor amenity space. Two of the octagonal towers are proposed to be retained: one on the south elevation and one on the west side elevation. The proposal was revised to include the conservation of the entirety of the octagonal one-and-a-half storey bay at the southeast corner of the building. The raised terrace and staircase on the south elevation and the projecting roof overhang are also proposed to be retained.

The retained heritage attributes of the property are proposed to be restored. The staircase is currently overclad with tiles that cannot be removed without damaging the original brick beneath. However, the stairs will be reconstructed with brick that closely matches the original based on historic photographs and physical evidence. Most of the side walls are proposed to be demolished to accommodate the new construction, but representative examples of the openings on the side elevations (west and east) with the bands of ribbon windows will be maintained to communicate the original design intent. The original window and door openings are to be retained and the original black metal frames of the ribbon windows, which are heritage attributes of the property, will be repaired and restored with new interior storms installed. The ground floor door and window openings will be maintained with new door and window units. The applicant intends to remove the existing paint from the retained portion of the building and to restore the concrete brick to its original appearance.

New Construction

Connecting to the rear of the heritage building, a 45-storey mixed-use residential building is proposed with a four-storey podium and two levels of underground parking. The four-storey podium is located to the west of the new tower, and it is stepped back 9.3 metres from the edge of the southern octagonal tower of the heritage building. This massing will have minimal visual impact from the pedestrian perspective. The proposed tower is located above the eastern half of the heritage building. At the fifth floor, the tower has a stepback that ranges from 2.21 metres from the front wall of the heritage building to 3.96 metres from the front edge of the octagonal one-and-a-half storey bay at the southeast corner of the building. At the third and fourth floors of the tower, the

stepbacks are greater, carving out more space above the heritage building to mitigate the visual impact of the tower. These stepbacks are not being measured from the VHA building's raised terrace, which has a strong presence and helps to maintain the visual prominence of the heritage building.

To the east of the VHA building, the tower meets the ground. In this location, a new at-grade side entrance is proposed to provide universal accessibility. The massing of the new construction is recessed where it connects to the heritage building, to showcase the unique form of its octagonal bay and terrace and to create an appropriate transition between old and new. The articulation of the new construction complements the VHA building's strong horizontal lines, and the proposed materials provide a subtle contrast in colour and texture, creating a harmonious composition.

Conservation Plan

Should Council approve the proposed conservation strategy, the owner should be required to submit a Conservation Plan for the work described in the Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by a qualified heritage professional to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning. The Conservation Plan should detail all the recommended interventions and conservation work including any recommended restoration work, a detailed plan describing how the heritage buildings will be protected during construction, a schedule of short and long-term maintenance requirements and estimated costs for all conservation work.

Interpretation Plan

Should Council approve the proposed conservation strategy, prior to the issuance of a Building Permit for the proposed development, the owner should be required to submit an Interpretation Plan. The Interpretation Plan should communicate the cultural heritage values of the VHA Building and its former function to users and visitors of the property.

Landscape Plan

Staff are recommending that the applicant be required to provide a final Landscape Plan that enhances the character of the VHA building to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning as a condition of building permit approval.

Heritage Lighting Plan

The Heritage Lighting Plan should provide details of how the heritage features of the building will be lit to highlight their heritage character.

Heritage Easement Agreement

Staff are recommending that the owner enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement to secure the long-term protection of 170 Merton Street.

CONCLUSION

Staff support the proposed conservation strategy and alterations in the context of the mitigation strategies outlined in this report and in the Heritage Impact Assessment and are of the opinion that the proposal has been designed to conserve the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of the VHA Building. As such, staff are satisfied the proposal meets the intent of the Planning Act, the Provincial Planning Statement (2024), and the City of Toronto's Official Plan Heritage Policies. Staff recommend that City Council approve alterations to the property at 170 Merton Street under Part IV, Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act, subject to conditions.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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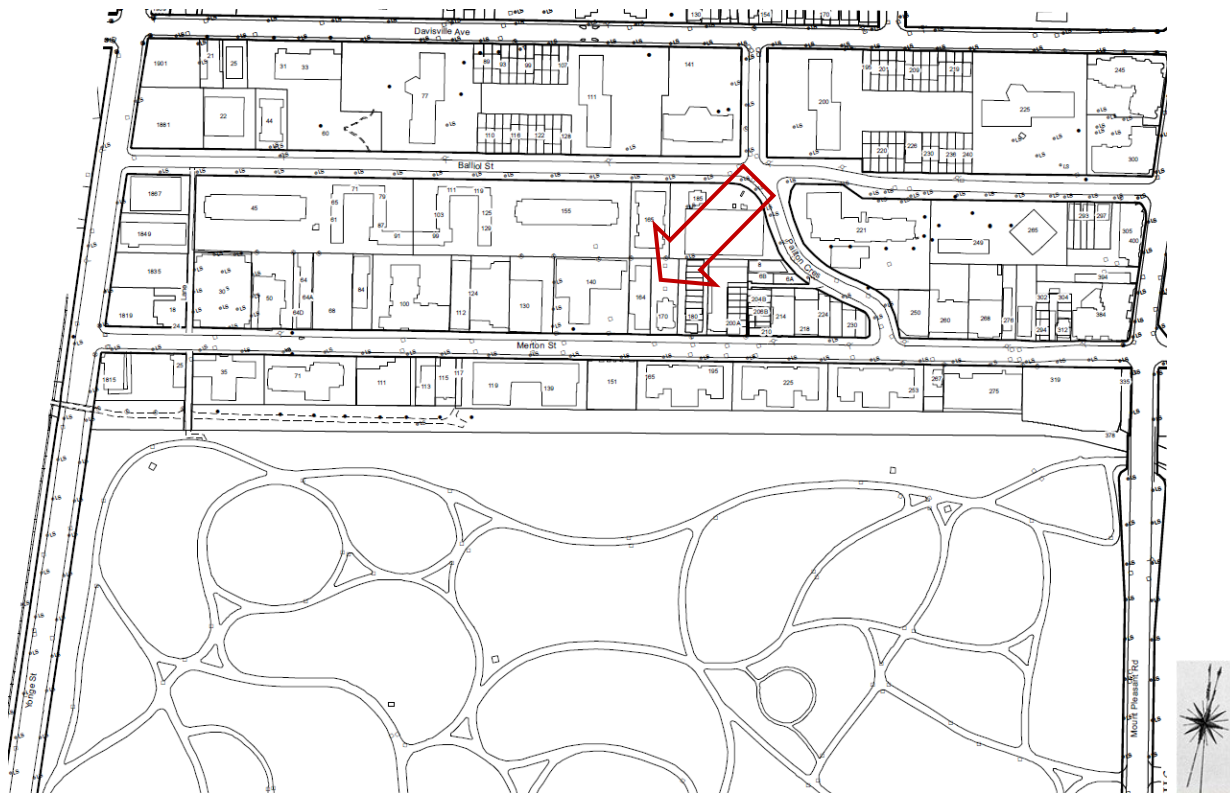
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Location Map
Attachment 2 - Aerial Photograph
Attachment 3 - Photographs
Attachment 4 - Selected Drawings

LOCATION MAP

ATTACHMENT 1

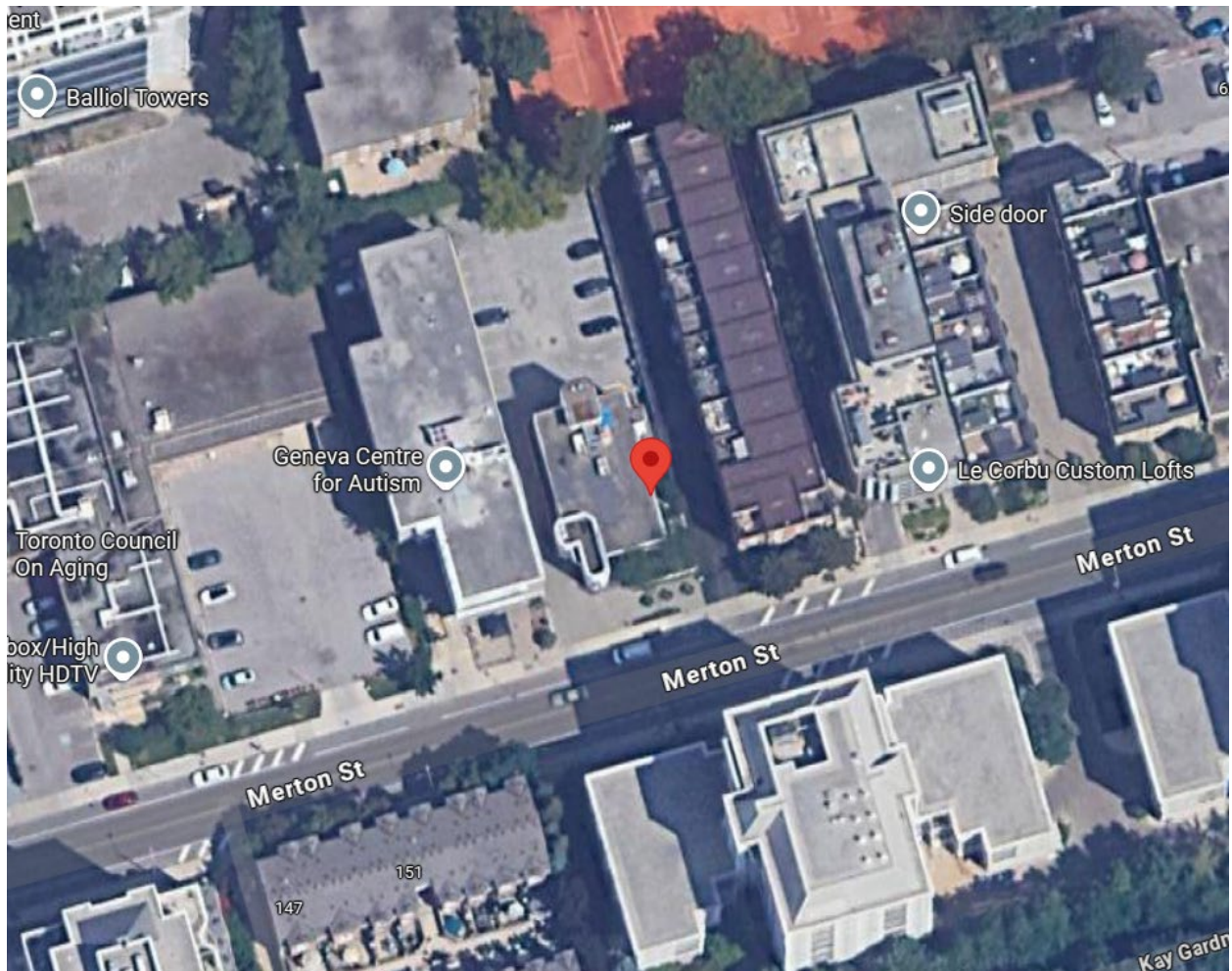
170 MERTON STREET



This location map is for information purposes only; the exact boundaries of the properties are not shown. The arrow marks the site of the property at 170 Merton Street on the north side of Merton Street between Yonge Street and Mount Pleasant Road.

**AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH
170 MERTON STREET**

ATTACHMENT 2



Aerial photograph showing the property at 170 Merton Street (Google Maps, 2025).

PHOTOGRAPHS

ATTACHMENT 3

170 MERTON STREET



Photograph of the former Visiting Homemakers Association (VHA) building, 170 Merton Street, principal (south) elevation (Google Maps, 2024)



Photograph of the VHA building looking northeast (Google Maps, 2024)



Photograph of the VHA building looking northwest (Google Maps, 2024)



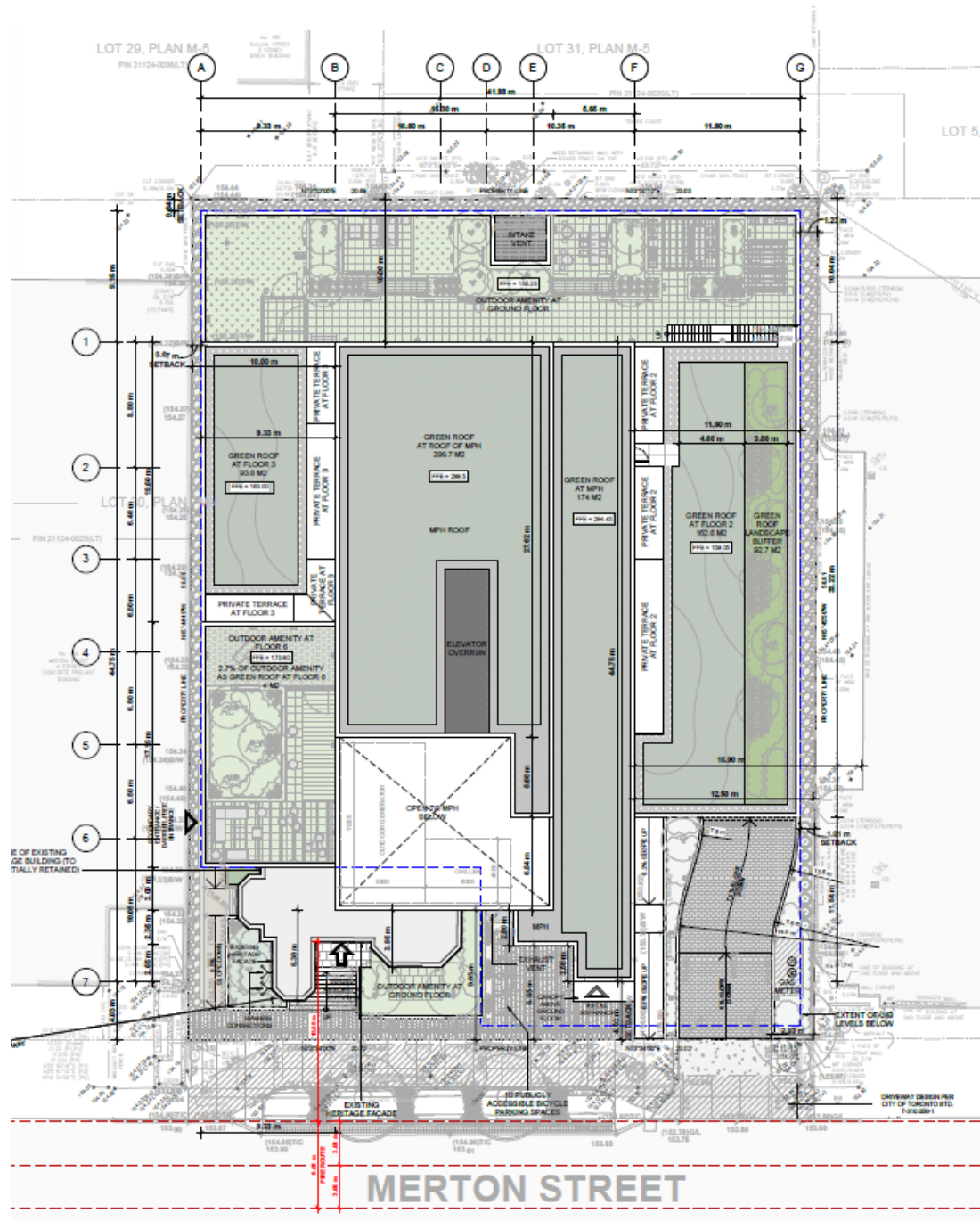
Early photograph of the VHA building showing the original pigment of the concrete brick cladding and paving (Leslie Rebanks)



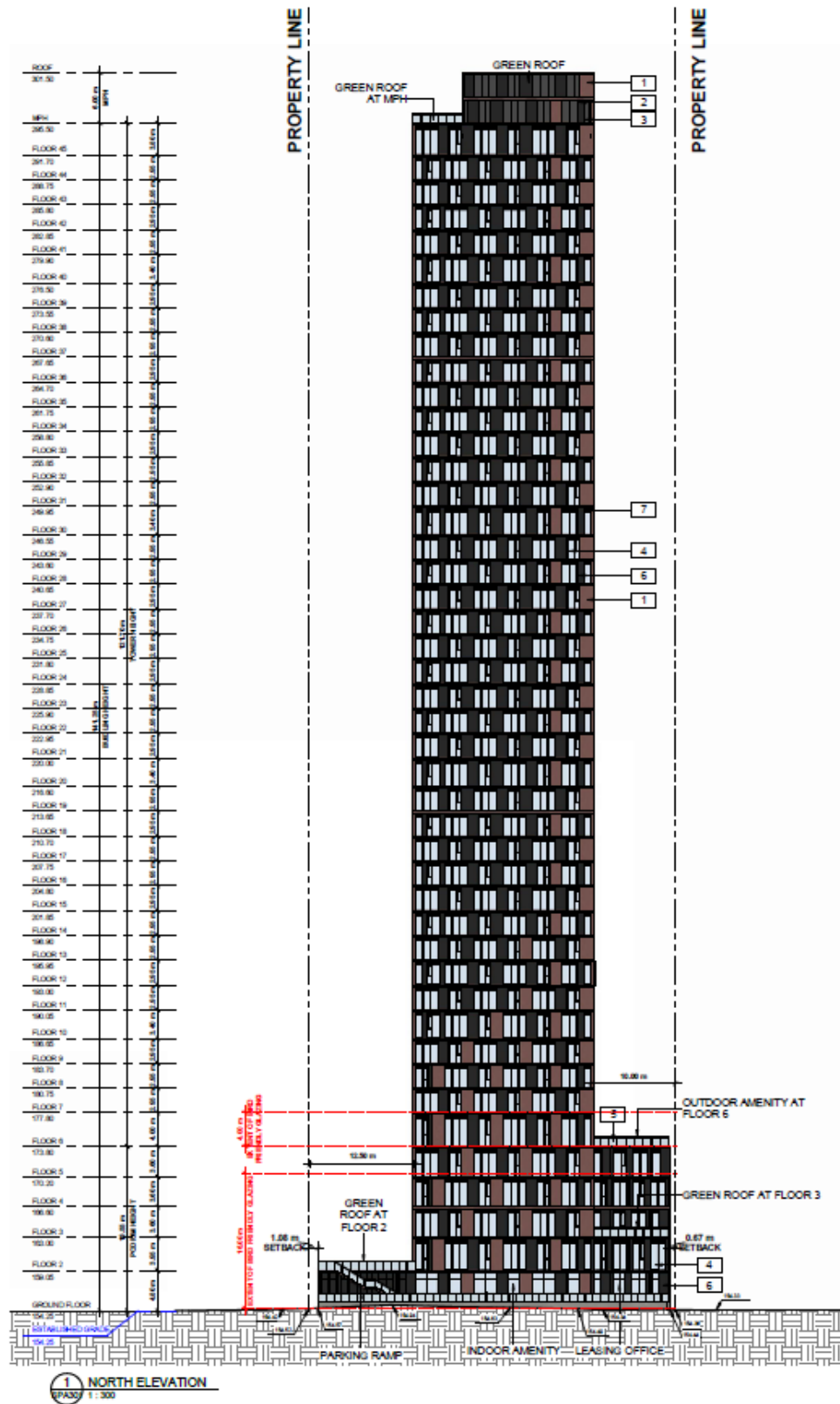
Early photograph of the VHA building, showing the principal (south) and side (east) elevations with original pigmented concrete brick (Leslie Rebanks)

SELECTED DRAWINGS 170 MERTON STREET

ATTACHMENT 4

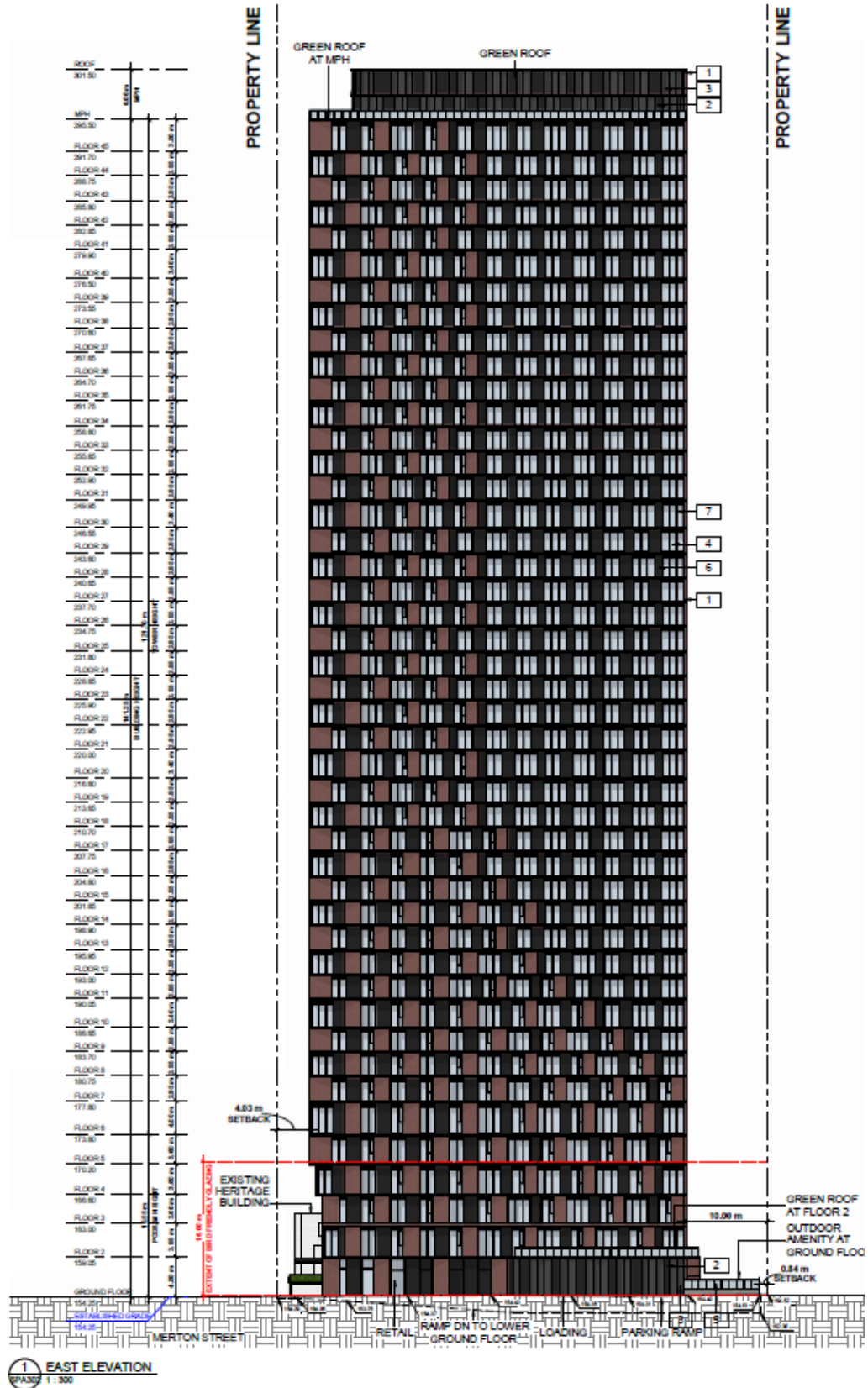


Site plan (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)

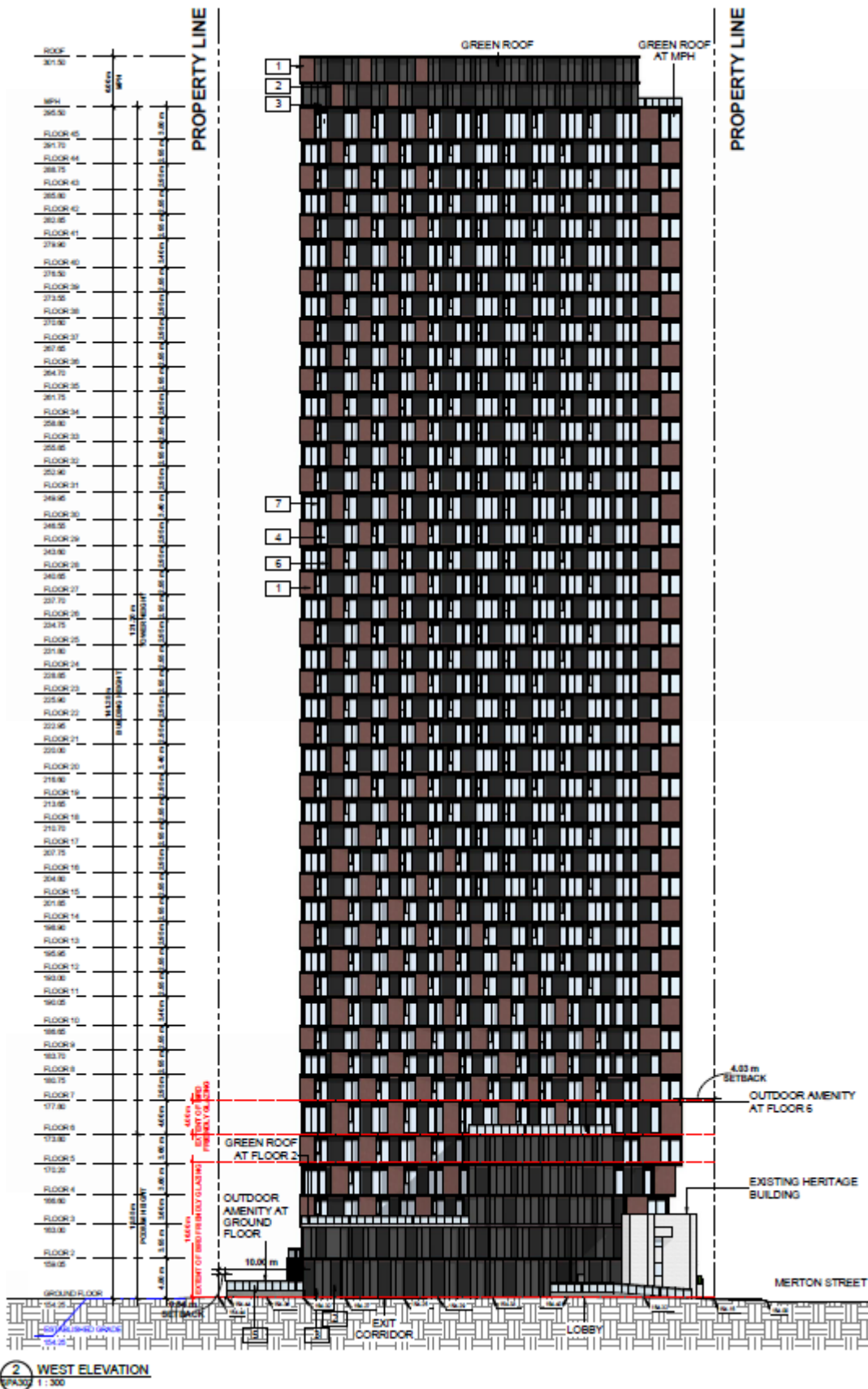


North elevation (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)

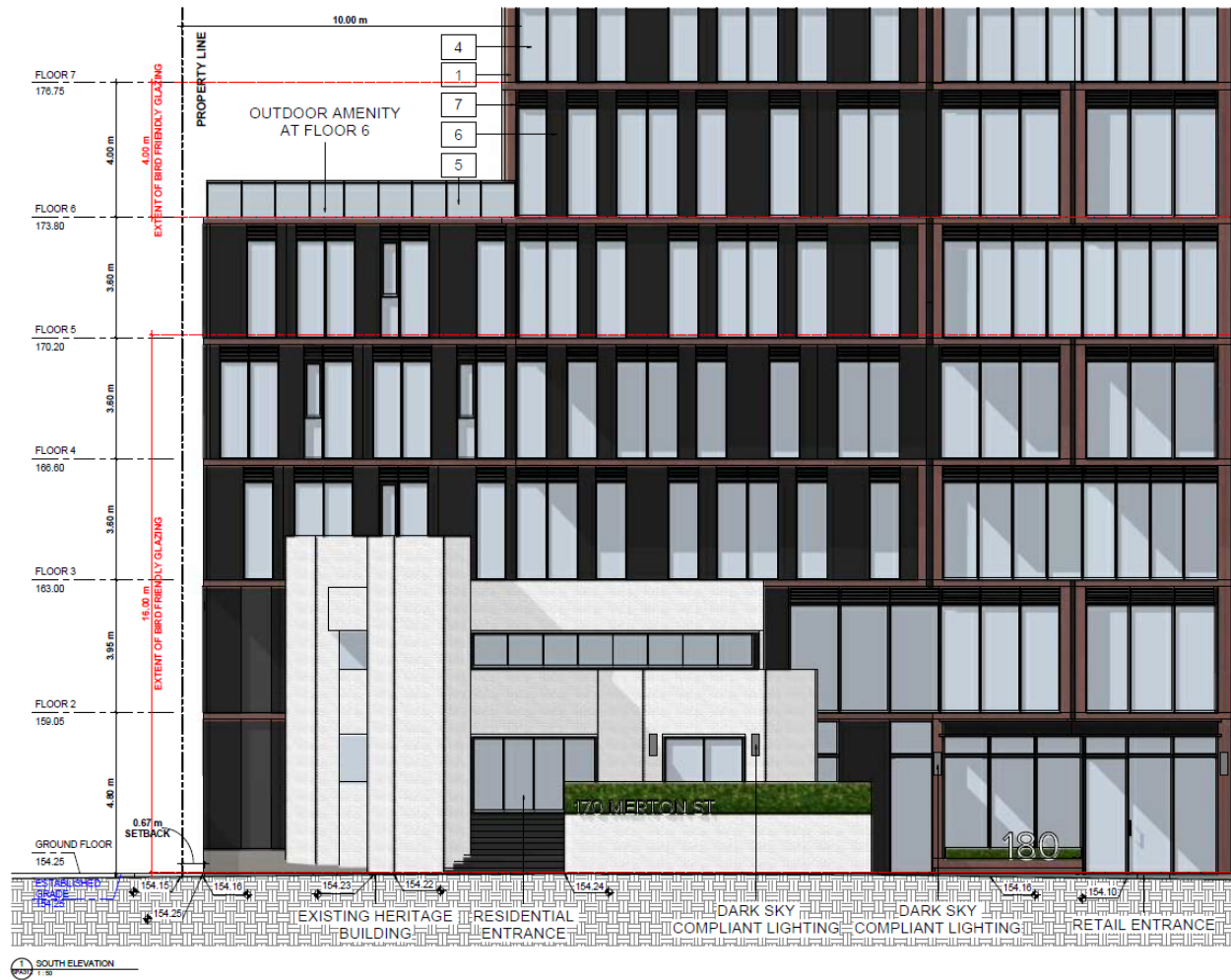
South elevation (Turner Fleicher, October 7, 2025)



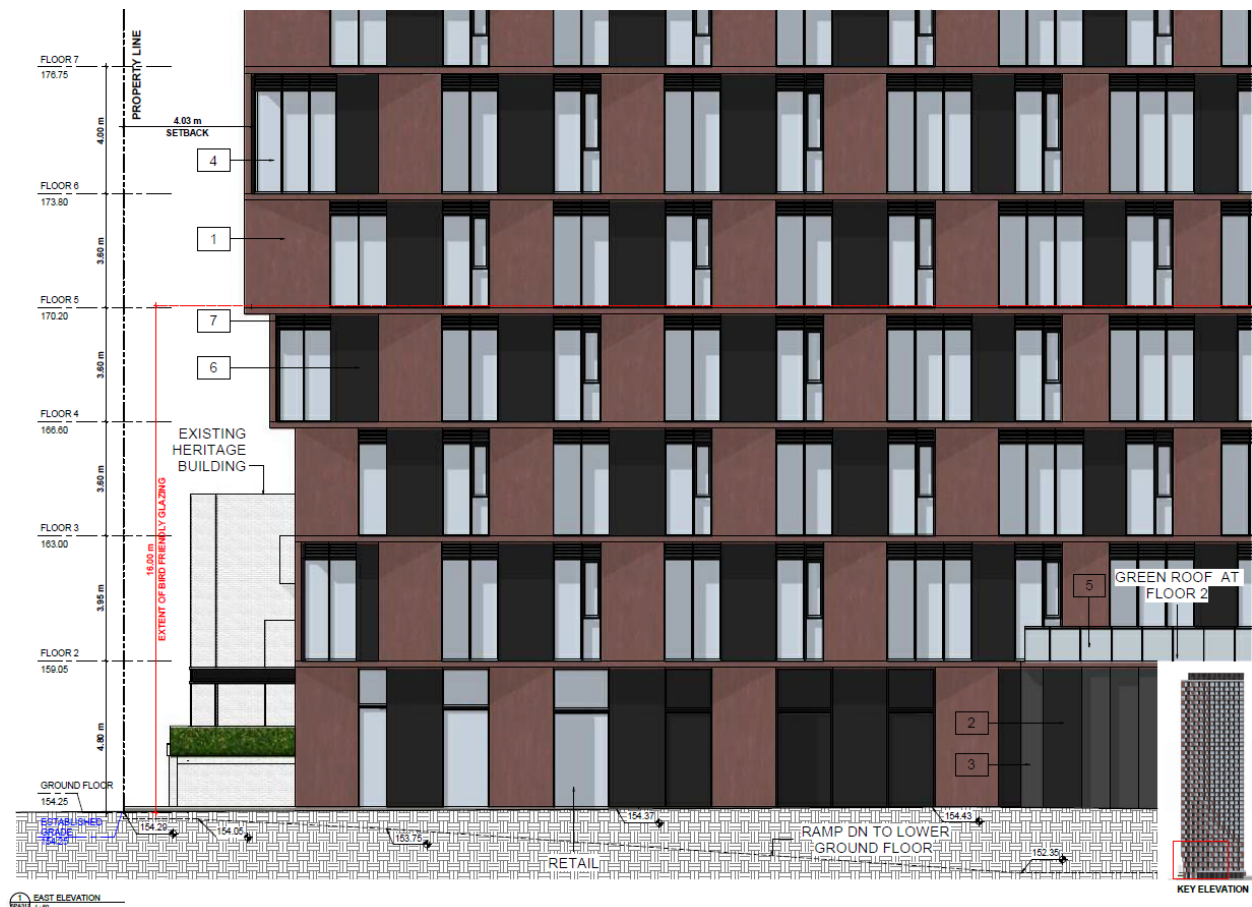
East elevation (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



West elevation (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



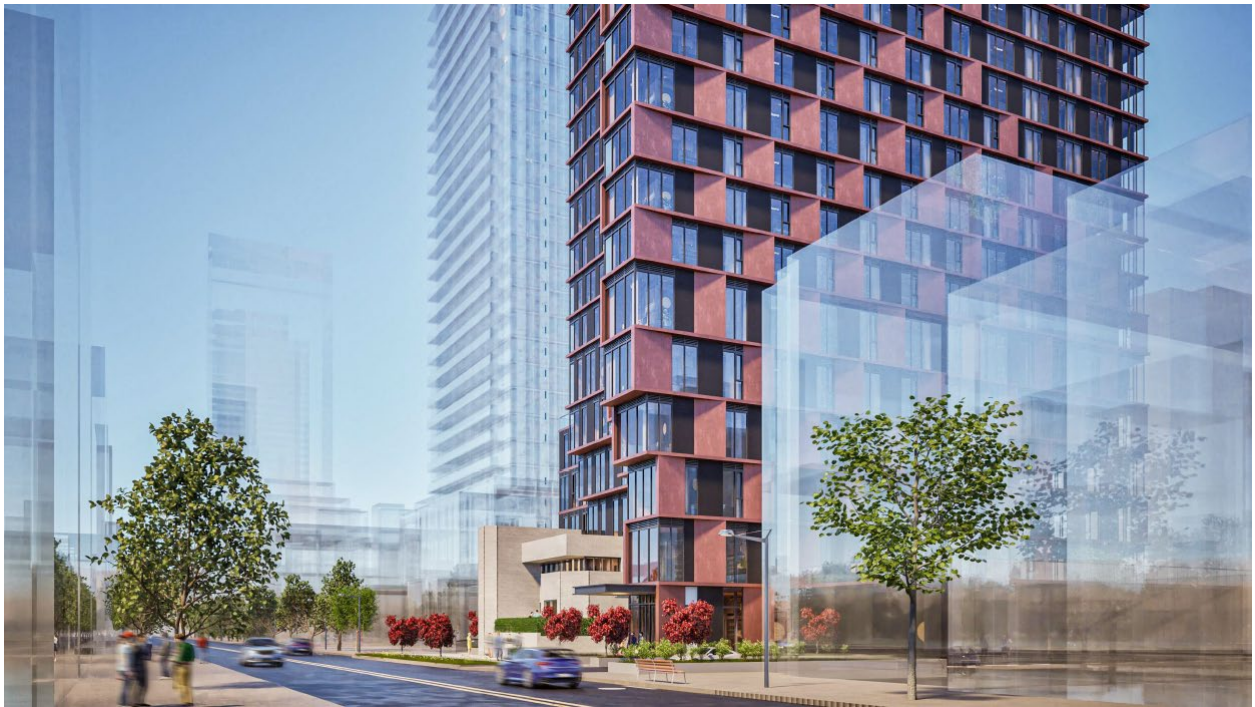
Detailed south elevation (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



Detailed east elevation (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



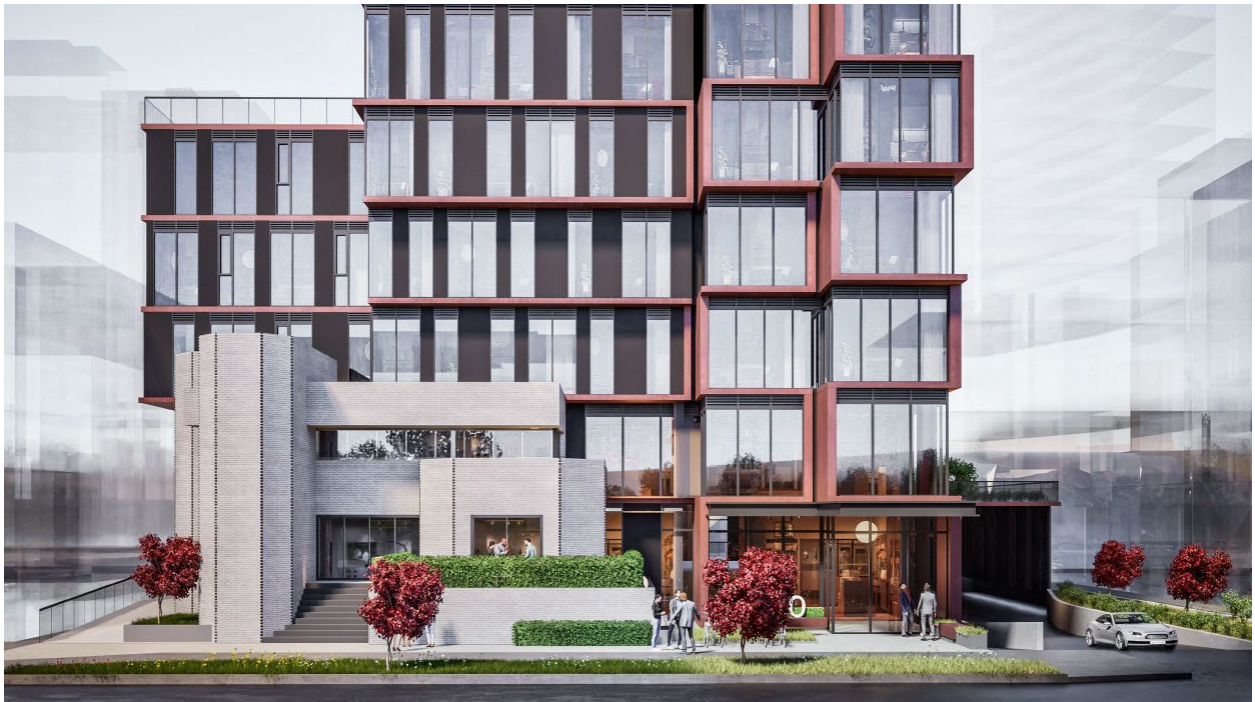
View from Merton Street looking north (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



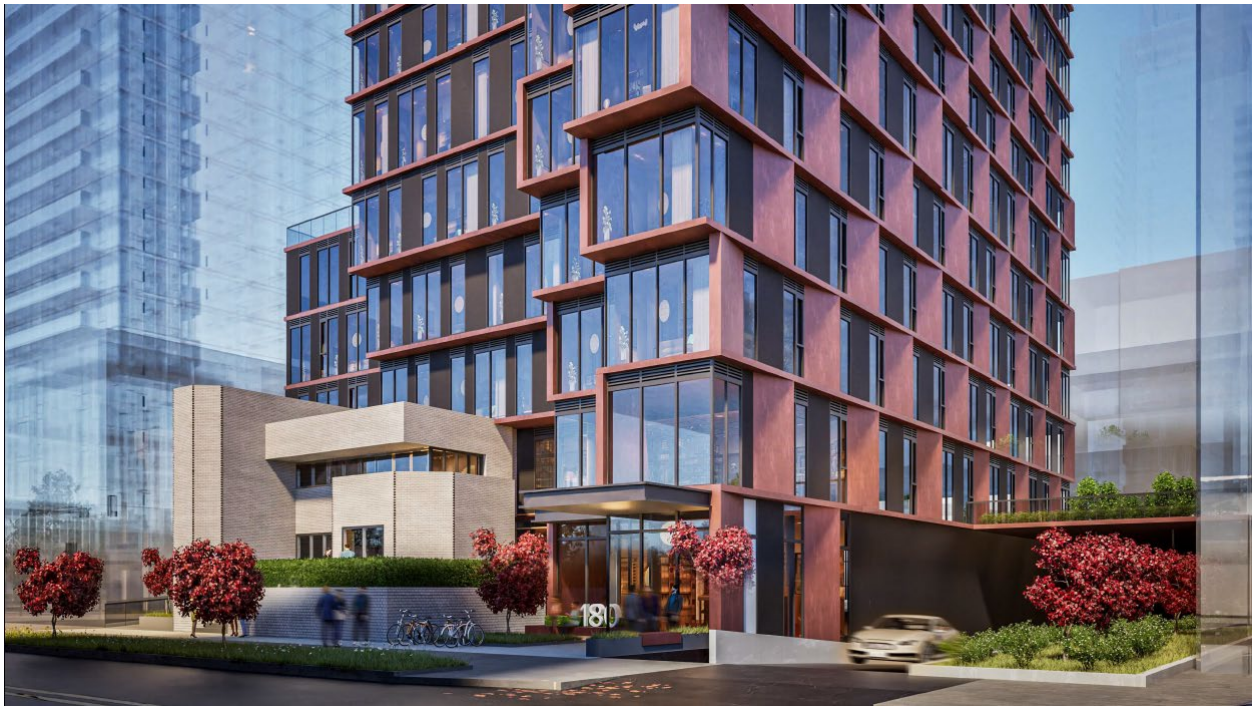
View from Merton Street looking northwest (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



View from Merton Street looking northeast (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



View from Merton Street looking north (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)



View from Merton Street looking northwest (Turner Fleischer, October 7, 2025)