

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

Date: April 27, 2026

To: Toronto Preservation Board

Toronto and East York Community Council

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

Wards: Toronto-Centre - Ward 13

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council approve an application under Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act to alter and demolish heritage attributes of a designated heritage property at 20 Gerrard Street East (the former Willard Hall building), in connection with the proposed development of the subject property through a forthcoming Minor Variance application, and that Council grant authority to enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement.

The subject property contains a four-storey Georgian-style institutional building owned by Covenant House Toronto that is currently being used as a social service facility supporting vulnerable populations. The property is designated under Part IV, Section 29, of the Ontario Heritage Act through Designation By-law 80-90.

The proposed development application for the subject site contemplates the construction of a 7-storey building that enhances the subject site's ongoing use as a social service facility providing transitional housing, wellness, education, employment, and community programs. A Heritage Impact Assessment was prepared by ERA Architects Inc., dated March 10, 2026, and revised April 14, 2026, that considers the impacts of the proposal.

Heritage Planning staff are satisfied that the proposed alterations continue to conserve the onsite and adjacent heritage properties and are consistent with the existing 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:

a. the alterations to the designated heritage property at 20 Gerrard Street East under Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act to allow for the construction of a 7-storey building, with such alterations to the designated heritage property being substantially in accordance with the plans and drawings prepared by ERA Architects Inc., dated March 2, 2026, and the Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by ERA Architects Inc., dated March 10, 2026, revised April 14, 2026, on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, all subject to and in accordance with an approved Conservation Plan and drawings satisfactory to the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning and subject to conditions as set out below; and

2. City Council direct that its consent to the application to alter the designated heritage property at 20 Gerrard Street East, in accordance with Part IV, Section 33 of the Ontario Heritage Act is subject to the following conditions:

a. prior to the issuance of any permit for all or any part of the properties at 20 Gerrard Street East, 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 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 prepared by ERA Architects Inc., dated March 10, 2026, revised April 14, 2026, for the property at 20 Gerrard Street East to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;

2. execute and register on title a Heritage Easement Agreement with the City for the property 20 Gerrard Street East, substantially in accordance with the plans and drawings dated March 2, 2026, prepared by ERA Architects Inc., and the Heritage Impact Assessment dated March 10, 2026, revised April 14, 2026, prepared by ERA Architects Inc., all on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, subject to and in accordance with the Conservation Plan required in Recommendation 2.a.1 above, to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning, including execution and registration of such agreement to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor;

3. provide building permit drawings, including notes and specifications for the conservation and protective measures keyed to the Conservation Plan required in Recommendation 2.a.1 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;

4. 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 Plan to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;

5. 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;

6. provide full documentation of the existing heritage property, including two (2) printed sets of archival quality 8" x 10" colour photographs with borders in a glossy or semi-gloss finish and one (1) digital set on a flash drive in tiff format and 600 dpi resolution keyed to a location map, elevations and measured drawings, and copies of all existing interior floor plans and original drawings as may be available, to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning;

7. submit a Signage Plan for the subject property to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning; and

8. 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

b. that prior to the release of an existing Letter of Credit 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 have been completed in accordance with the approved Conservation Plan and Interpretation Plan 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.

3. 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 20 Gerrard Street East.

4. City Council authorize the City Solicitor and City staff to take all necessary actions to implement City Council's decision.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

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 January 29, 1990, 20 Gerrard Street East was designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act by the Council of the former City of Toronto. The Designation By-law for the property can be accessed here:

<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/pre1998bylaws/toronto%20-%20former%20city%20of/1990-0080.pdf>

BACKGROUND

Heritage Property

The development site, 20 Gerrard Street East and 21 McGill Street, is located on the north side of Gerrard Street East, west of Yonge Street and east of Church Street. The site also has frontage along the south side of McGill Street. The surrounding built-form context includes mid- and high-rise institutional and residential properties along Gerrard Street East, and predominantly low-rise residential properties along McGill Street. The surrounding area also includes a variety of public parks and green spaces, including the adjacent McGill Parkette.

The subject site currently contains a four-story Georgian-style institutional building which is currently being used as a social service facility. The property is designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act through Designation By-law 80-90.

The building was originally constructed in 1911 as a three-storey building for the use as a residence for young women. The building, designed by the prominent architectural firm of Burke, Horwood, & White Architects, comprises the extant four-column east entrance portico flanked by two projecting bays. In 1921, the building was extended to the west by architect Francis R. Berry, and a fourth storey was added to complete the existing architectural form. The addition used matching materials and architectural detailing to the 1911 structure, introduced the extant four-column west portico and west projecting bay at the principal façade, and unified the two parts into a symmetrical composition capped by a central gabled parapet with inset stone panels.

The site also contains a four-storey institutional building wing at 21 McGill Street, originally constructed in 1892 as a YMCA. The building was subject to major reconstruction work after a fire in 1980. The Gerrard Street and McGill Street buildings

were integrated in 2000 following the purchase of 21 McGill Street by Covenant House Toronto.

Adjacent Heritage Properties

The subject property is adjacent to the following designated heritage properties:

- 385 Yonge Street (the Gerrard Building) - a three-storey stone building designed by Sproatt & Rolph and constructed in 1924, designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act on May 15, 2019, through By-law 800-2019.
- 401-405A Yonge Street (the Joseph Bickerstaff Block) - a three-storey masonry building designed by William Stewart and constructed in 1873, designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act on May 15, 2023, through By-law 452-2023.

Along McGill Street, the property is adjacent to several residential properties listed on the City's Heritage Register on March 15, 1974, including: 18-22 McGill Street (row housing c. 1910), 24-28 McGill Street (row housing c. 1893-1894), and 23-27 McGill Street (row housing c. 1891).

Additionally, the building is considered adjacent to the relocated remnant façade of the Normal School (c. 1851), originally located at 21, 31-33 Gerrard Street East, that was listed on the City's Heritage Register on November 21, 1973.

Development Proposal

On March 13, 2026, the owner applied for a Heritage Permit application to permit the proposed alterations under the Ontario Heritage Act. The applications propose the construction of a 7-storey mid-rise building at 20 Gerrard Street East and 21 McGill Street as a purpose-built youth services hub.

The principal (south) elevation and a portion of the east return wall of 20 Gerrard Street East will be retained in-situ and integrated into the new construction. A portion of the west return wall will be reconstructed. The proposal includes demolition of the building at 21 McGill Street.

Heritage Planning Policy Framework

Cultural heritage resources are protected and managed as part of planning for future growth under the Provincial Planning Statement (2024). Heritage Conservation is enabled through the Ontario Heritage Act. The City of Toronto's Official Plan implements the provincial policy regime, the Planning Act, the Ontario Heritage Act and provides policies to guide decision making within the city.

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 Planning Statement (2024)

The Provincial Planning Statement 2024 (PPS), issued under the authority of Section 3 of the Planning Act, provides policy direction on matters of provincial interest related to land use planning and development. The PPS sets the policy foundation for regulating the development and use of land. Key objectives include:

- building strong communities
- wise use and management of resources
- protecting public health and safety

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, use and/or management of built heritage resources in a manner that ensures their cultural heritage value or interest is retained under the Ontario Heritage Act."

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:

3.1.6.4 - 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 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.

3.1.6.6 - The adaptive re-use of properties on the Heritage Register is encouraged for new uses permitted in the applicable Official Plan land use designation, consistent with the "Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada."

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 façades alone is discouraged.

The City of Toronto Official Plan can be found here:

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

Standards and Guidelines

The Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada is the official document guiding planning, stewardship and 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

Heritage Planning staff have reviewed the Heritage Impact Assessment (dated March 10, 2026) submitted in support of the proposal for conformity with the Planning Act, the Provincial Planning Statement, and the City's Official Plan heritage policies.

The recommendations in this staff report relate solely to approvals required under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act. The proposal also requires approval under the Planning Act (Minor Variance). Heritage Planning staff will continue to provide comment within the planning process, including citing heritage conditions as necessary.

Staff were unable to amend the designation to reflect a post-2005 O. Reg. 9/06 Criteria evaluation prior to this report due to time constraints. Nevertheless, the architectural details contained in the 1990 Reasons for Designation are fulsome, and a draft 2026 statement of significance was available to inform the review of heritage impacts. An amending designation by-law will be brought forward at an appropriate time.

Conservation Strategy

The conservation strategy in the HIA proposes the in-situ retention of the entire south (principal) elevation of the designated heritage building at 20 Gerrard Street East, as well as a portion of the east return wall (to a depth of approximately 6.7 metres). A portion of the west return wall (to a depth of approximately 2.4 metres) is proposed to be reconstructed with new masonry to maintain the volumetric reading of the heritage resource. A façade-retention feasibility study prepared by Entuitive Corporation, dated February 27, 2026, confirms that the proposed retention is structurally feasible and outlines a methodology for the construction period. The proposed work will alter the architectural form of the existing heritage building, and the red brick walls with stone band courses, keystones and sills.

The building's primary architectural features as identified in Designation By-law 80-90, are principally located on the south elevation. As the south elevation and a portion of the east elevation are proposed to remain in-situ, the proposed work will not alter the three, two storey bay windows with decorative iron railings at roof level, the regular fenestration of the building, the continuous third storey cornice, the central gabled parapet and name band, the fourth-storey pilasters and cornices centred above the end bay window features, and the symmetrical façade. The retained building will maintain its presence on Gerrard Street East and the overall Georgian architectural character will be conserved.

To accommodate barrier-free access on the subject site, the application proposes to remove the non-original concrete stairs and alter the existing floor levels to align the first floor with the three existing arched openings at street level along Gerrard Street East. Each entrance is designed to provide transparent, barrier-free access at grade, supporting equitable arrival for different user groups while maintaining the legibility of the building and entrances along the primary public frontage. Currently, the vertical separation between the first floor and street level is over 2 metres, with 17 risers between grade and the existing main floor.

The arched entrance doorways are identified in the 1990 reasons for designation, and the conservation strategy preserves the primacy of the brick and stone arches, while allowing each entrance to become fully accessible. The fabric within the arched openings will be removed. Ramps were explored as an alternative approach by the heritage consultant; however, ramps could not be accommodated due to the substantial differences in height and the 0-metre lot line condition.

The building's original windows were replaced with vinyl casement windows in 1992. The conservation strategy includes the installation of new historically appropriate wood windows throughout to replace the existing non-original vinyl windows, based on historic documentation and archival evidence. The existing bronze lettering within the central name band will be removed and stored for potential future reuse, and the name band will be cleaned and repaired. The retained masonry will be cleaned, repointed, and, if necessary, localized brick and stone repairs will be completed.

Details of restoration/conservation work will be set out in a Conservation Plan to be completed to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning.

Proposed Development

The application proposes the construction of a 7-storey mid-rise building at 20 Gerrard Street East and 21 McGill Street as a purpose-built youth services hub. A new 3-storey addition is proposed above the retained heritage elevation along Gerrard Street East. The proposed development involves the demolition of 21 McGill Street.

The proposed construction introduces setbacks and design measures to respect the heritage property. As shown in the plans and architectural drawings prepared by ERA Architects Inc., the new construction at Levels 5 to 7 is proposed to be set back approximately 6 metres from the primary elevation along Gerrard Street East,

maintaining the existing architectural form of the heritage building as viewed from the public realm. The building will continue to be read as an architectural landmark.

Beginning at Level 5 above the primary elevation, the new construction will include contemporary material and massing that is distinct from the masonry of the heritage building. The material will maintain the legibility of the heritage building along Gerrard Street East. Additionally, the proposed new construction does not involve the inclusion of terraces or balconies above the heritage elevations.

The proposal also includes the demolition of the heavily altered building at 21 McGill Street. The new design along McGill Street is proposed to compliment the adjacent heritage buildings through a coordinated approach to massing, materiality, façade rhythm and transitional strategies.

Alterations

To accommodate the new construction, the proposed development anticipates the removal of the interior court space of 20 Gerrard Street East. With the 1921 expansion, the former west elevation of the 1911 building became an interior-facing wall within the interior court space. The space is a narrow, multi-level void between the original building and the later addition, which functioned primarily as a service alley and to provide light and air to the adjoining interiors. The second-floor rooftop space is not accessible and is physically disconnected from the at-grade area. According to the heritage consultant, the interior court space poses a security and personal safety risk for youth due to its unsecure street access.

The new construction proposes a contemporary triple-height interior volume to reinterpret the volume of the court space. The removal is considered appropriate in this case, given that the functional elements of the project include secure locations for community gathering and contemporary building systems that more effectively provide light and ventilation.

Two wood porticos frame the primary entrances of the building along Gerrard Street East. The portico roofs feature decorative wrought iron balcony railings that replaced original wooden balustrades with decorative turned wood balusters between 1931 and 1955 (per archival photos). The application proposes the removal and off-site storage of both entrance porticos and portico elements, including columns, iron railings, and stone bases. Both porticos would be reinstalled in their original locations. Although removal and replacement can be supported by staff, in-situ retention of the porticos is preferred. The removal of the porticos was originally understood to be required to accommodate the façade retention structure; however, through discussions with the heritage consultant, the ability to conserve the porticos in-situ during construction could be feasible subject to further investigation and detailed design.

The heritage consultant has confirmed they will endeavour to develop a façade retention design concept that retains the porticos in-situ during construction, with details provided in the Conservation Plan.

Adjacent Heritage Resources

Heritage Planning staff are satisfied that the proposal conserves the cultural heritage value of the individually designated heritage properties at 393 Yonge Street and 405 Yonge Street. The proposed 7-storey building will not alter the form, massing or any character-defining elements of the adjacent heritage buildings along McGill Street.

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 HIA, to be prepared by a qualified heritage professional to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning. The Conservation Plan should detail the recommended interventions and conservation work including any recommended restoration work, a detailed plan describing how the heritage building 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, the applicant should be required to submit an Interpretation Plan to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning. The interpretation plan should serve to communicate the cultural heritage values of the Willard Hall building to users and visitors of the property.

Heritage Lighting Plan

Should Council approve the proposed conservation strategy, the applicant should be required to submit a heritage lighting plan to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning. This lighting plan should include details of how the Willard Hall building will be lit to highlight its unique heritage character.

Signage Plan

Should Council approve the proposed conservation strategy, the applicant should be required to submit a Signage Plan to the satisfaction of the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning. The recommended Signage Plan should provide details of the signage strategy for the heritage property, including the appropriate type, scale, location, and number of signs.

Heritage Easement Agreement

Staff is recommending that the owner enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement to secure the long-term protection of 20 Gerrard Street East.

CONCLUSION

Heritage Planning staff are supportive of alterations proposed for the designated heritage property at 20 Gerrard Street East in the context of the conservation and mitigation strategies proposed for the site. Heritage Planning staff support the retention 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.

Heritage Planning staff are satisfied the proposal meets the intent of the Planning Act, the Provincial Planning Statement, and the City of Toronto's Official Plan heritage policies in conjunction with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada. Staff recommend that Council approve the proposed alterations and demolitions, and grant authority to enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement.

An amending designation by-law for the heritage property that will update the 1990 Reasons for Designation will be brought forward at an appropriate time.

CONTACT

Neil MacKay
Heritage Planner, Heritage Planning
Urban Design, City Planning
Tel: 416-338-6441
E-mail: Neil.Mackay@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Mary L. MacDonald, MA, CAHP
Senior Manager, Heritage Planning
Urban Design, City Planning

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Location Map
Attachment 2 - Photographs
Attachment 3 - Selected Drawings

LOCATION MAP

ATTACHMENT 1

20 Gerrard Street East

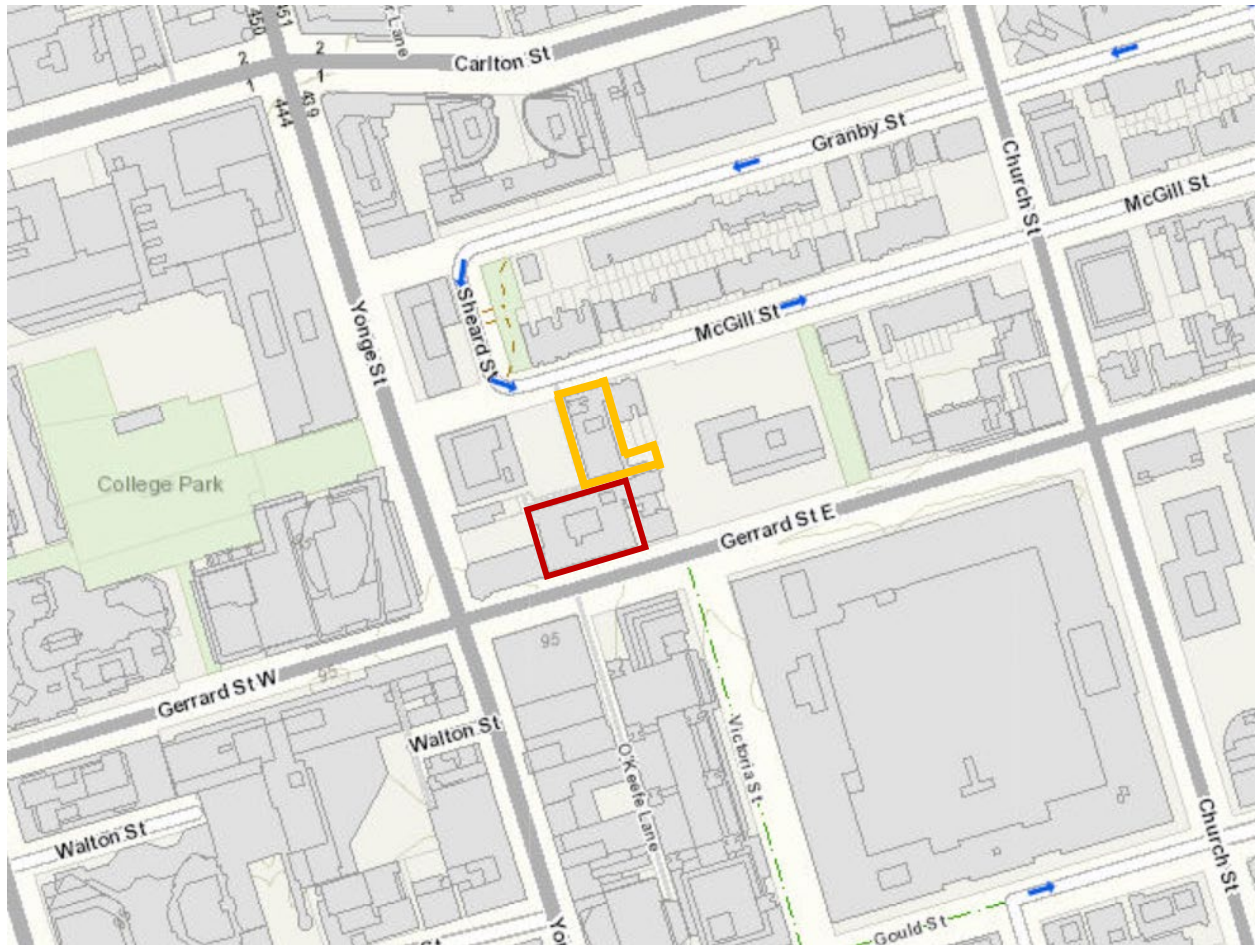


Figure 1: Location Map showing the property at 20 Gerrard Street East (in red) and the property at 21 McGill Street (in yellow), on the north side of Gerrard Street East south of McGill Street. This location map is for information purposes only; the exact boundaries of the property are not shown (City of Toronto Mapping).

20 Gerrard Street East



Figure 2: Primary (south) elevation of 20 Gerrard Street East (ERA Architects Inc., 2026).



Figure 3: Portion of the side (west) elevation of 20 Gerrard Street East (ERA Architects Inc., 2026).



Figure 4: Side (east) and a portion of the primary (south) elevation of 20 Gerrard Street East (ERA Architects Inc., 2026).



Figure 5: Rear (north) elevation of 20 Gerrard Street East (ERA Architects Inc., 2026).



Figure 6: Primary (north) elevation of 21 McGill Street East (ERA Architects Inc., 2026).



Figure 7: Side (west) elevation of 21 McGill Street (ERA Architects Inc., 2026).

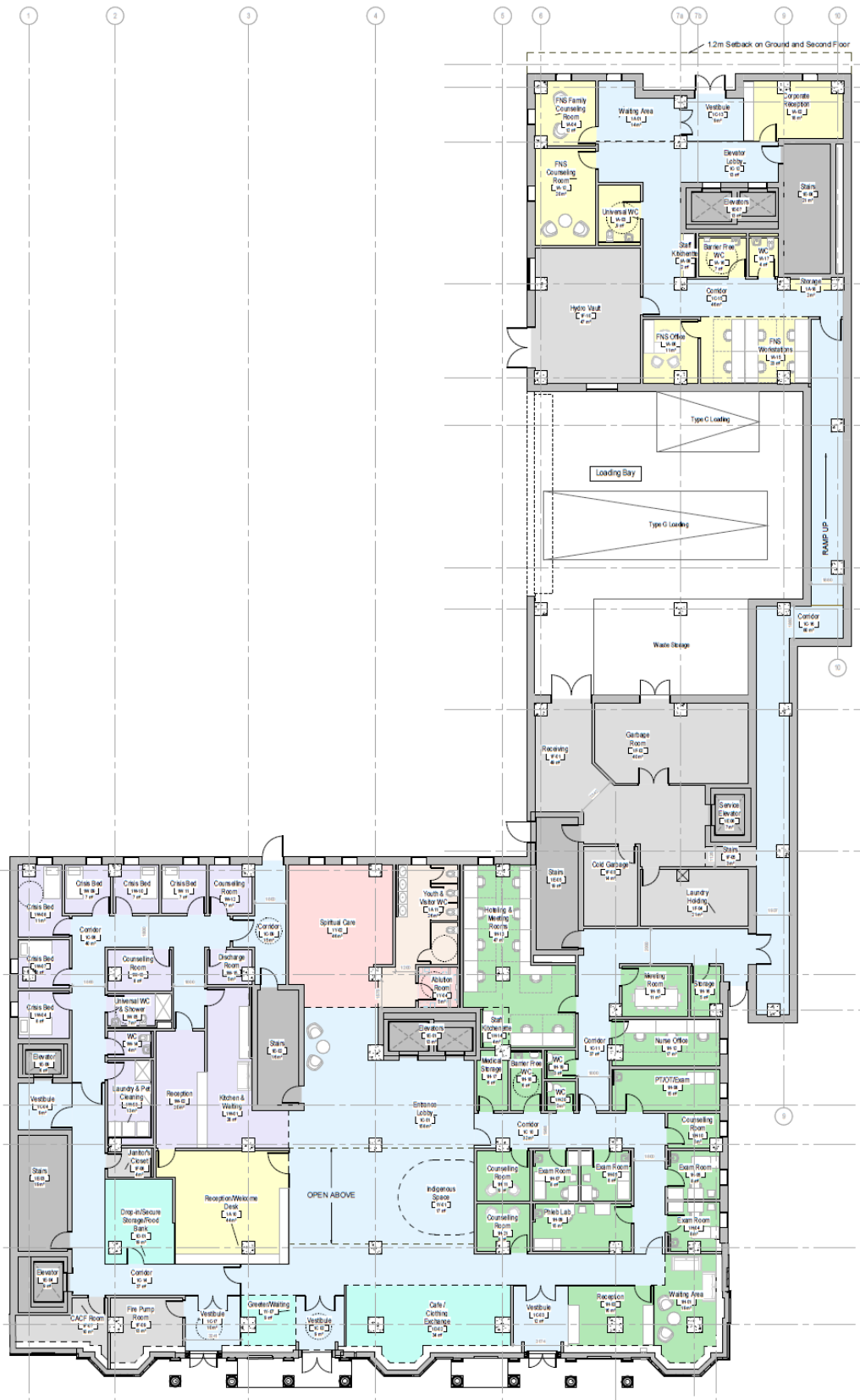


Figure 9: Ground floor for 20 Gerrard Street East included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc. & Hilditch Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).

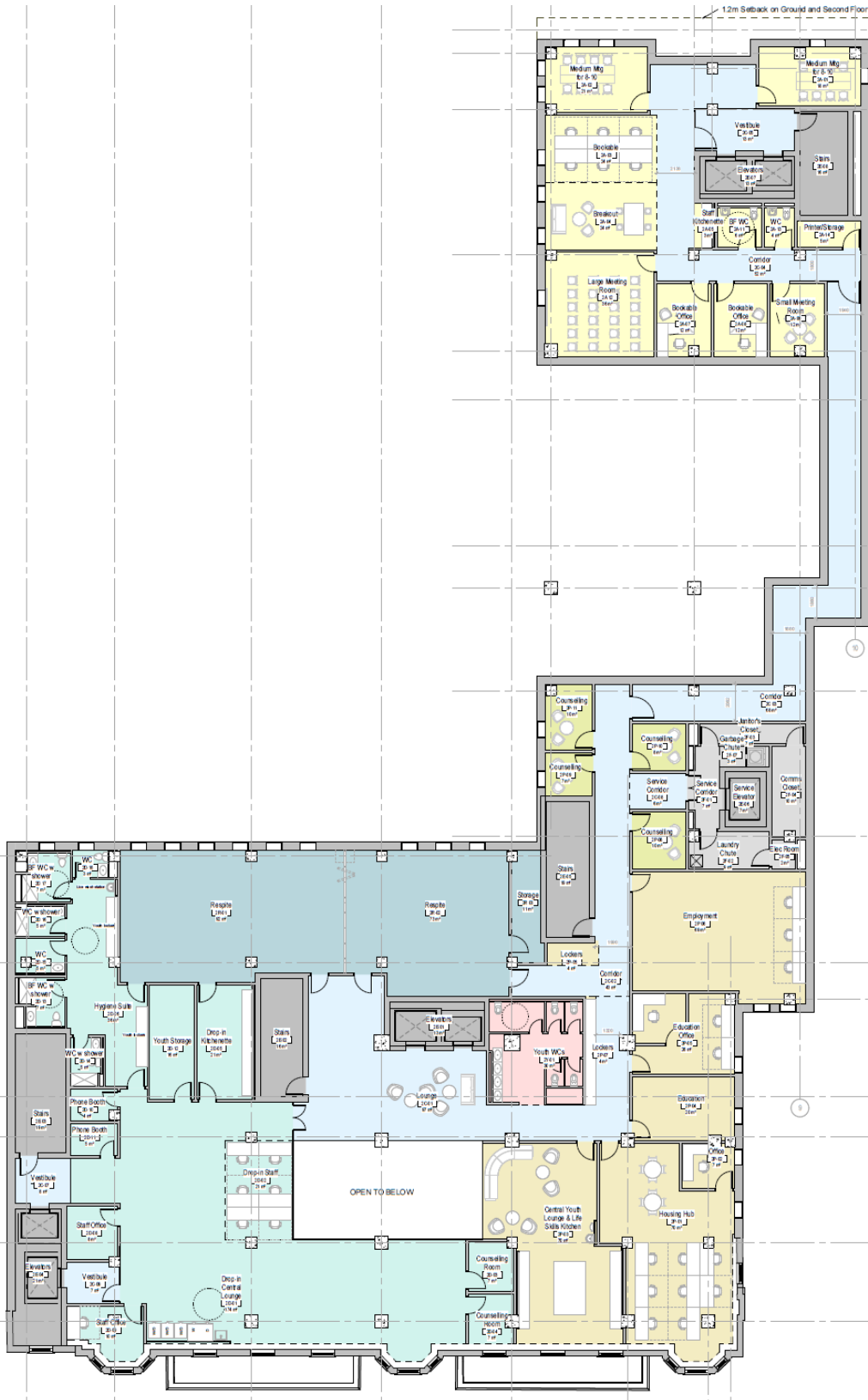


Figure 10: Level 2 floor plan for 20 Gerrard Street East included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc. & Hilditch Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).

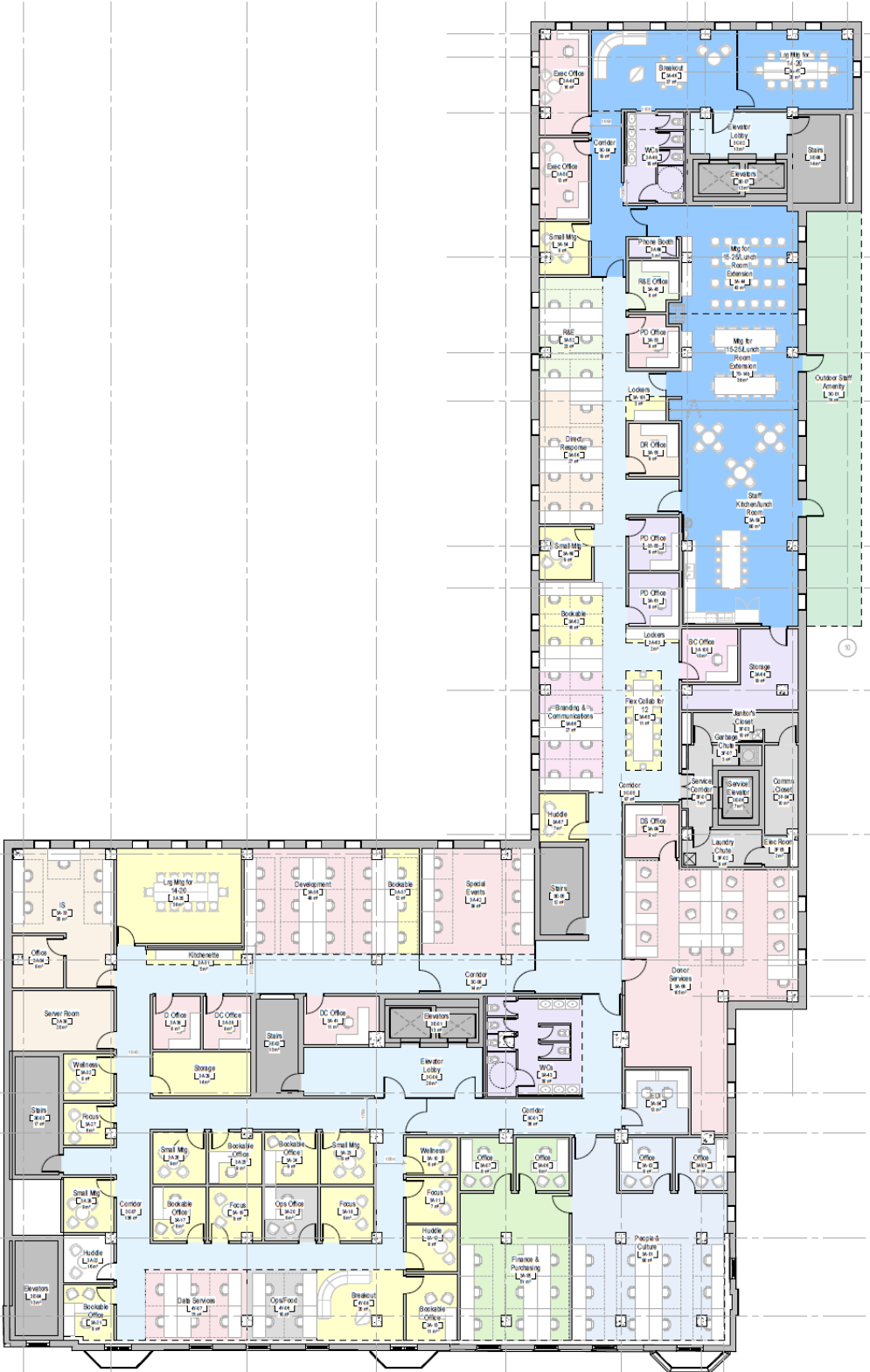


Figure 11: Level 3 floor plan for 20 Gerrard Street East included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc. & Hilditch Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).

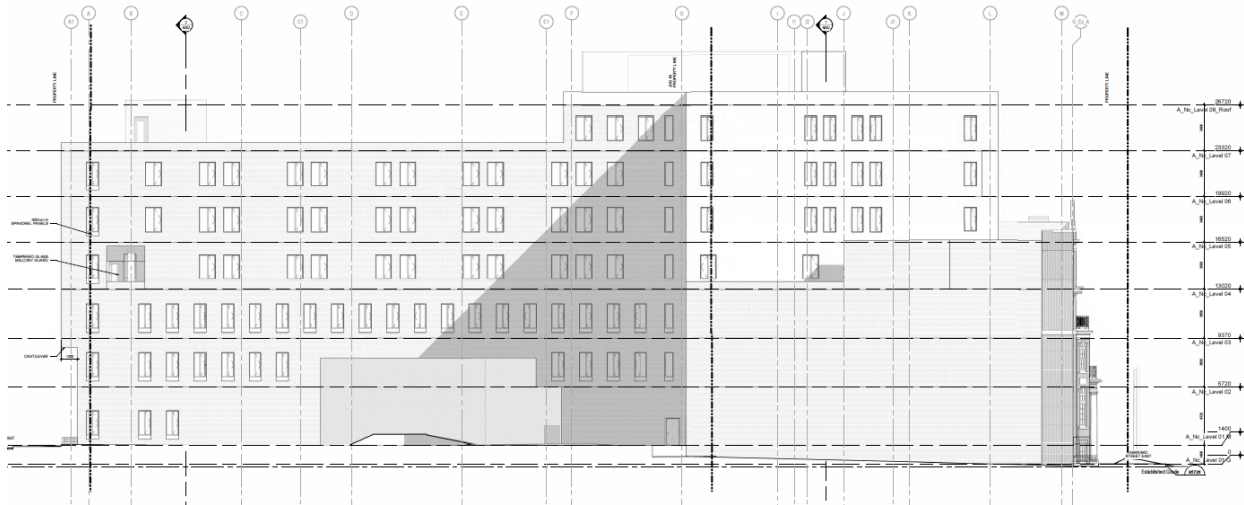


Figure 14: East elevation drawing included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).

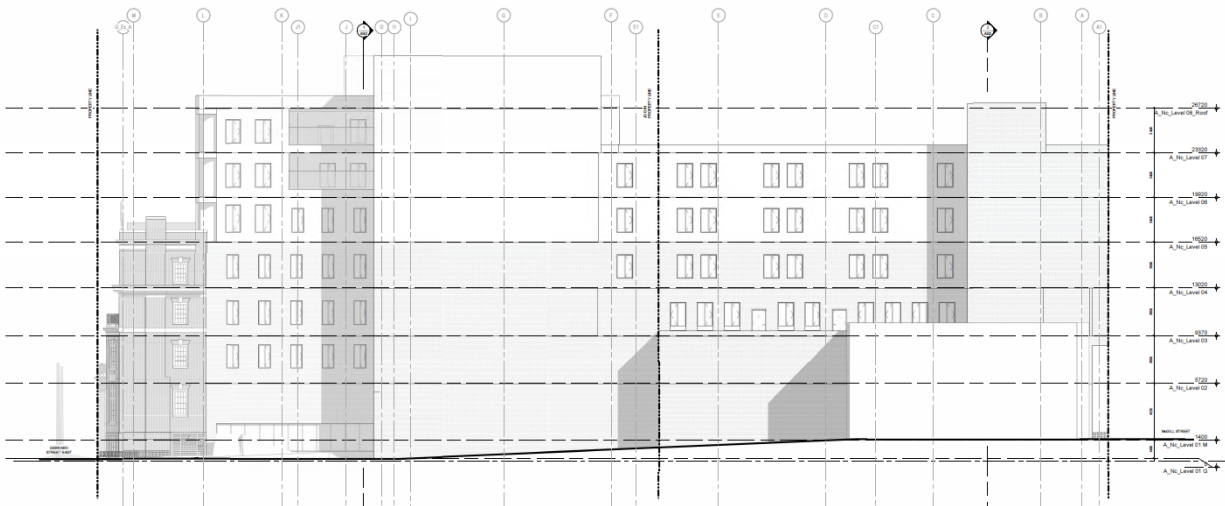


Figure 15: West elevation drawing included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).



Figure 16: North elevation drawing included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).

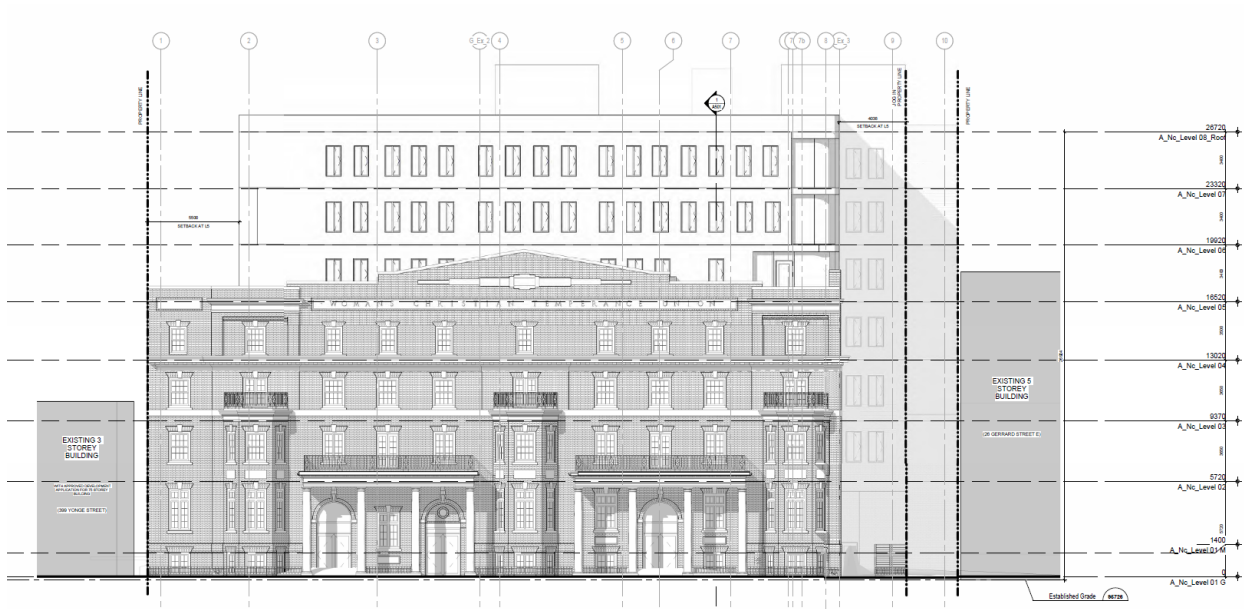


Figure 17: South elevation drawing included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).



Figure 18: Diagram of retained elevations (left) and diagram of retained and reconstructed elevations (right), included for illustration purposes (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).



Figure 19: Rendering of 20 Gerrard Street East looking northwest (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).



Figure 20: Rendering of 21 McGill Street looking southwest (ERA Architects Inc., March 3, 2026).