

Appeal of the Chief Building Official's Decision for a Sign Variance Application for Two First Party Wall Signs at 207 Queens Quay West

Date: October 8, 2026

To: Sign Variance Committee

From: Manager, City-Wide Priorities (A), Toronto Building

Wards: Spadina-Fort York (Ward 10)

SUMMARY

This report concerns an appeal of the decision of the Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building (the "CBO") respecting an application for two variances required to allow the CBO to issue sign permits for two first party wall signs (the "Proposed Signs") located on property commonly known as the Queen's Quay Terminal, at 207 Queens Quay West (the "207 Queens Quay"). The variances and Proposed Signs are further described in Attachment 1 to this report.

Aird & Berlis LLP representing Northam (QQT) Holdings Limited and 10954594 Canada Inc (collectively the "Appellant") have filed an appeal of the CBO's decision to refuse the requested variances for the sign variance application (the "Sign Variance") originally submitted by Kramer Design Associated Limited (the "Applicant").

After conducting a review and public consultation in accordance with the requirements of the Sign By-law, the CBO made a decision to refuse to grant the requested variances, on the basis that the application did not meet all of the mandatory criteria for the two Proposed Signs. Specifically, the CBO determined that the Applicant failed to establish that either of the two Proposed Signs would be compatible with the development of the premises and surrounding area, would support the Official Plan objectives for the premises and surrounding area, would not alter the character of the premises or surrounding area and would not be contrary to the public interest, as it will be further described in this report. The Decision Notice can be found in Attachment 5.

As a result of the Appellant filing the appeal, the Sign Variance Committee ("SVC") is now required to conduct an *appeal de novo*, meaning that the SVC shall determine whether it has been demonstrated that the Sign Variance meets all eight criteria, on the basis of the information presented to the SVC. The SVC may make a decision to refuse or grant the variance requested for the Sign Variance, or to make a decision to grant different variances, or impose conditions which were not included in the Sign Variance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Building Official and Executive Director, Toronto Building, recommends that:

1. The Sign Variance Committee refuse to grant the two variances to section 694-21.D(5)(a) as required to allow for the issuance of permits respecting the erection and display of both of the Proposed Signs, as further described in Attachment 1 to this report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no current or known future year financial impacts arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

FP-26-36477 (File #26-184194)

On June 15, 2026, a Sign Variance application was submitted for two wall signs, each containing one sign face, displaying static copy. On July 27, 2026, a decision was made that refused to grant the requested variances on the basis that four of the eight criteria, as contained in §694-30A of the Sign By-law, were not established for either of the two Proposed Signs. Subsequently, the Appellant filed an appeal of the CBO's decision.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Required Variance

Table 1: Summary of Requested Variances

Section	Requirement	Proposal
694-21.D(5)(a)	A CR-Commercial Residential sign district may contain a wall sign, other than a sign displaying a logo or corporate symbol, provided the sign shall not be erected above the second storey.	The Proposed Signs would be located above the second storey.

Sign Attributes and Site Context

The Sign Variance relates to two first party wall signs, each displaying static copy. Each of the Proposed Signs would feature one sign face measuring 17.68 metres in length by

1.88 metres in width, height of 29.13 metres and would be erected on the north elevation of the building, facing north.

Figure 1: Renders of Proposed Sign

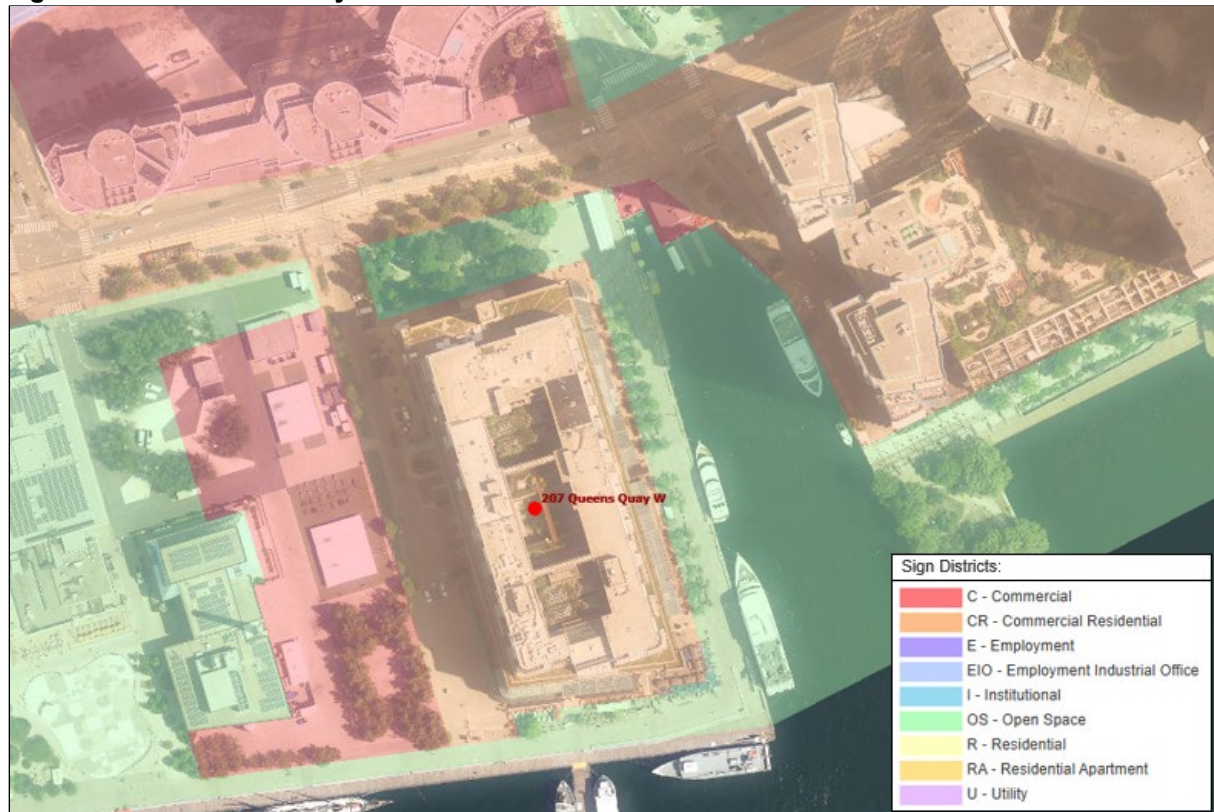


Staff have confirmed that 207 Queens Quay is located entirely within a Commercial Residential ("CR") Sign District on the south side of Queens Quay West in Ward 10, Spadina-Fort York (see Figure 2, SignView Map). While first-party wall signs are a permitted sign type within a CR Sign District, they are generally not permitted above the second storey. An exception exists for office buildings containing 10 or more storeys, where a sign may be located on the uppermost storey, mechanical penthouse, or parapet wall, subject to prescribed limitations. 207 Queens Quay contains Queen's Quay Terminal, a mixed-use building comprising retail, office, and residential uses, and the Proposed Signs do not satisfy the applicable requirements respecting building use or permitted sign location. Accordingly, a variance from the Sign By-law is necessary to allow for the erection and display of the Proposed Signs.

207 Queens Quay is also listed on the City's Heritage Register. Pursuant to §694-5B(4) of the Sign By-law, a sign permit cannot be issued until all applicable approvals from Heritage Planning have been obtained. As the proposal involves a heritage property, even if the requested variances were approved, any subsequent sign permit would remain subject to the receipt of required heritage approval. Heritage Planning was consulted during the Sign Variance process and was not in support of the proposal.

207 Queens Quay is surrounded by CR Sign District lands to the west and Open Space ("OS") Sign District lands to the north, east, and south. The CR-designated lands immediately to the west, commonly known as Exhibition Common at Harbourfront Centre, function as an outdoor landscaped public plaza. As a result, the lands surrounding 207 Queens Quay are predominantly characterized by open space and public realm uses.

Figure 2: 207 Queens Quay West



Surrounding premises:

North: Toronto Waterfront Park – OS Sign District

South: Toronto Waterfront Park – OS Sign District

East: Waterfront Trail – OS Sign District

West: Exhibition Common – CR Sign District

COMMENTS

Criteria Established by §694-30A of The Sign By-law

The Sign By-law contains specific criteria used in evaluating Sign Variance and Signage Master Plan applications. Specifically, §694-30A states that a variance may only be granted where it has been determined that proposed sign(s) meets each of the established criteria.

When a decision regarding a first party Sign Variance or Signage Master Plan application is appealed, the Sign Variance Committee conducts an *appeal de novo*. This would require the Sign Variance Committee to conduct an evaluation to determine whether the party seeking the variance(s) has demonstrated that the proposed sign, or signs contained within a Sign Variance, meet all eight criteria established in the Sign By-law at present, based on the information presented to the Sign Variance Committee.

Applying the Established Criteria

Section 694-30A(1): The Proposed Sign belongs to a sign class permitted in the Sign District where the premises is located

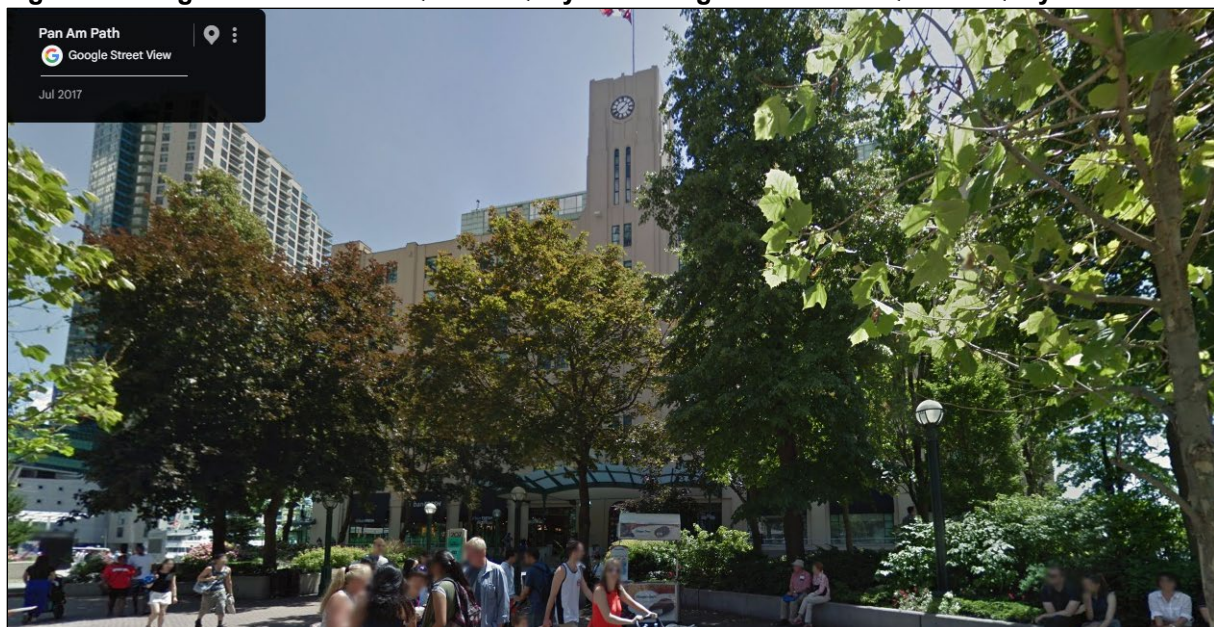
The Applicant's rationale indicates that 207 Queens Quay is a CR sign district and that the Proposed Signs are first party signs as they would display retail tenant information and building identification (Attachment 3 pp. 5, 7). The Applicant expressly states that the Proposed Signs constitute a permitted sign class within a CR sign district.

Based on the review of the available information, the CBO is of the opinion that this criterion has been established.

Section 694-30A(2): The Proposed Sign is compatible with the development of the premises and surrounding area

The Applicant's rationale acknowledges Queen's Quay Terminal as a historically significant mixed-use building containing retail, office, and residential uses, situated within an active waterfront corridor characterized by cultural institutions, residential developments, hotels, transit facilities, and waterfront attractions (Attachment 3, pp. 9-10, 7). Their submission states that the Proposed Signs have been designed to provide building and tenant identification for a property that is set back from Queens Quay West and substantially screened by mature street trees, resulting in limited visibility from the public realm (Attachment 3, pp. 11, 13, 15-17). The submission further states that the Proposed Signs are compatible with the surrounding context because it is designed to capture and direct existing pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicular activity to the building (Attachment 3, pp. 15-16).

Figure 3: Google Street View at Queens Quay W looking towards 207 Queens Quay

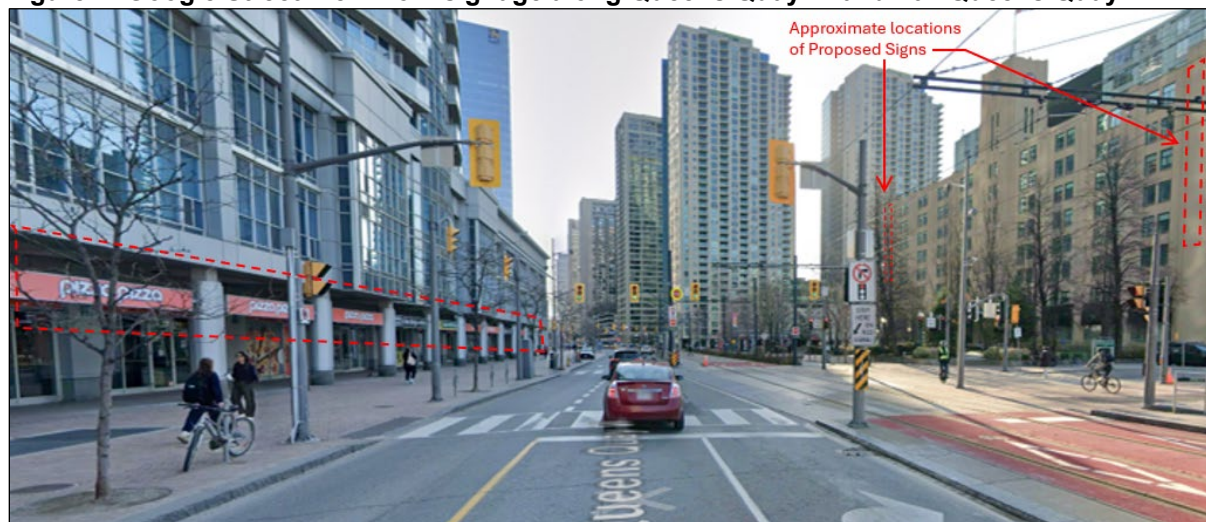


Staff note that the tree canopy identified in the submission is seasonal in nature. During periods when foliage is absent, lower-level signage would be visible from the public

realm. During periods of full foliage, the Proposed Signs would likely experience visibility constraints from street-level due to the same tree coverage (Figure 3).

The purpose of the CR Sign District regulations is to encourage pedestrian-oriented signage that supports the identification of local businesses and contributes to a vibrant street-level environment. Staff's review indicates that existing commercial signage within the immediate surrounding area is generally located at the first or second storey, consistent with these objectives (refer to Figure 4). By contrast, the Proposed Signs would extend between approximately the fourth and eighth storeys and are substantially larger and more prominent than surrounding signage.

Figure 4: Google Street View from signage along Queens Quay W and 207 Queens Quay



Given the size and placement height above the pedestrian realm, staff is of the opinion that the Proposed Signs represent a significant departure from the established signage pattern in the area and from the pedestrian-oriented objectives of the CR Sign District regulations.

Similar concerns were raised in public submissions, which described the signs as visually intrusive, out of scale with the waterfront context, and inconsistent with the character of the area (Attachment 4).

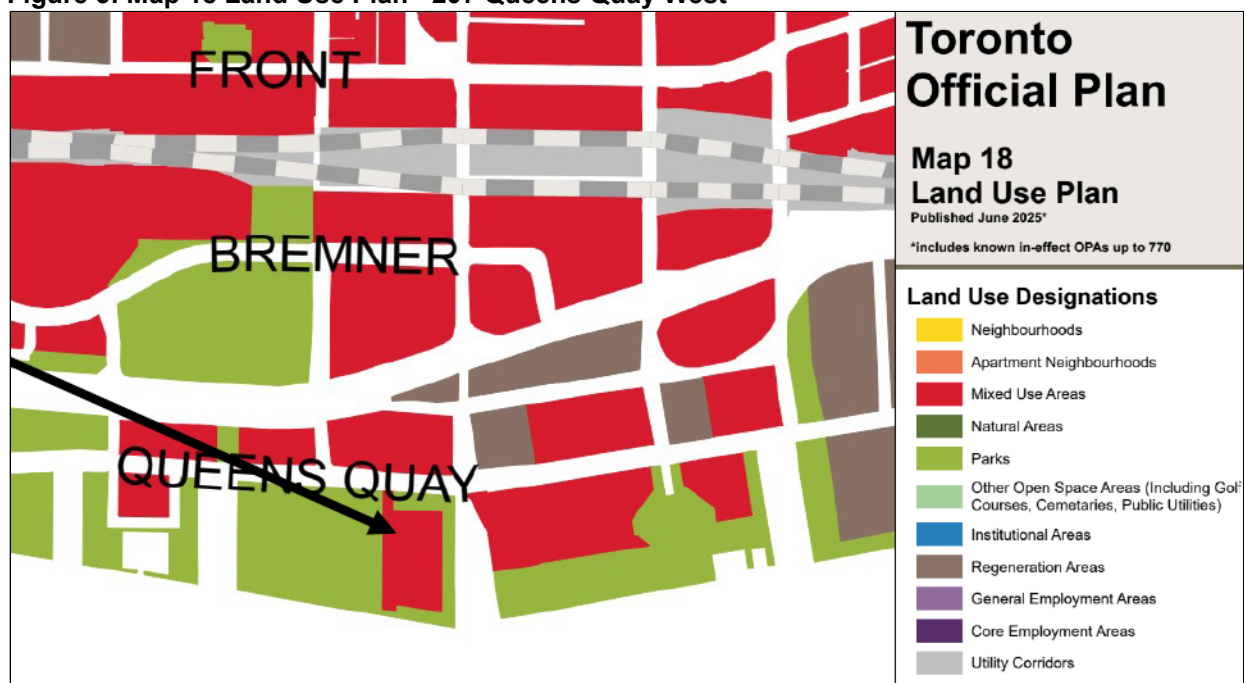
As a result, the CBO is of the opinion that the Applicant's submissions for Sign Variance did not demonstrate that the Proposed Signs would be compatible with the development of the premises and surrounding area, and this criterion has not been established.

Section 694-30A(3): The Proposed Sign supports Official Plan objectives for the subject premises and surrounding area

The Applicant states that the Proposed Signs will support the Official Plan by supporting the identification and revitalization of mixed-use centres, particularly those within proximity to public transit and the waterfront, encouraging public discovery of the site, and contributing to waterfront activation (Attachment 3, pp. 16). While the submission notes broad planning objectives and explains how the proposal is intended to advance them, no specific policy has been referenced.

Staff acknowledges that the Proposed Signs may support certain Official Plan objectives applicable to Mixed Use Areas by assisting in the identification of commercial uses and activities located on 207 Queens Quay. However, 207 Queens Quay is also a property listed on the City's Heritage Register, and the Official Plan contains specific policies respecting the conservation of cultural heritage resources.

Figure 5: Map 18 Land Use Plan - 207 Queens Quay West



Policy 3.5 of the Official Plan states that alterations or development affecting a property on the Heritage Register must ensure that the property's cultural heritage value and attributes are retained to the satisfaction of the City. Through consultation undertaken as part of the Sign Variance review, Heritage Planning advised that signage of the proposed size and location is not consistent with heritage signage best practices, does not reflect the building's historic architectural composition, and may require installation methods that could adversely affect the heritage resource.

The Applicant's submissions, which did not include a Heritage Impact Assessment, Heritage Impact Statement, or other heritage analysis, did not adequately address heritage concerns. While staff recognize the potential benefit associated with improved property identification, this objective could also be achieved through signage that complies with the Sign By-law and does not require the variances sought. As such, the Applicant's submissions did not demonstrate how the proposal would achieve those objectives while also conserving the heritage character and attributes of 207 Queens Quay.

In addition, numerous submissions received from the public during the consultation period raised concerns regarding visual impact, heritage character, light trespass, and the effect of the Proposed Signs on the surrounding waterfront environment (Attachment 4). These concerns are consistent with the broader issues identified through the staff review and reinforce staff's view that the proposal has not been

demonstrated to advance the public interest objectives reflected in the Sign By-law and Official Plan.

The Chief Building Official is of the opinion that the Applicant's supporting materials submitted for the Sign Variance did not demonstrate that the Proposed Signs would support the Official Plan objectives. As a result, this criterion has not been met.

Section 694-30A(4): The Proposed Sign does not adversely affect adjacent premises

The Applicant contends that the Proposed Signs will consist of static-copy, halo-lit signs and will not incorporate flashing, animated, or changing display elements. They indicate that the Proposed Signs have been designed with consideration for neighbouring buildings, residential sightlines, and view corridors, and that there are no projecting elements that would interfere with pedestrian movement or extend into adjacent properties. The submission further states that illumination will comply with the applicable light level requirements of Chapter 694 and that there will be no adverse light spill onto surrounding properties (Attachment 3, p. 16).

While the Applicant states that the Proposed Signs will not adversely affect adjacent premises and will comply with applicable illumination requirements, the submission does not include a lighting study, visual impact assessment, view analysis, or other technical assessment demonstrating the extent of potential impacts on adjacent residential properties or nearby open spaces. The surrounding area includes residential buildings, publicly accessible waterfront areas, and OS Sign District lands that would have direct views of the Proposed Signs. Given the scale, illumination, and elevated location of the Proposed Signs, staff are not satisfied that the information submitted adequately demonstrates that the proposal would not adversely affect adjacent premises.

These concerns are also reinforced by numerous objections received from residents of nearby buildings expressing concerns regarding potential light trespass, glare, nighttime illumination, visual intrusion, and impacts on residential enjoyment of property (Attachment 4). Several objectors specifically noted that the Proposed Signs would directly face residential units and could affect views, sleeping conditions, and the overall residential environment.

The CBO is of the opinion that the Applicant's submissions have not demonstrated that adverse impacts on adjacent premises have been sufficiently addressed. As a result, this criterion has not been established.

Section 694-30A(5): The Proposed Sign does not adversely affect public safety, including traffic and pedestrian safety

The City's Sign By-law regulations are intended to mitigate public safety impacts by ensuring that signs meeting prescribed standards do not create visual or physical hazards. The Applicant submits that the Proposed Signs have been designed and reviewed to ensure they will not impair pedestrian or vehicular sightlines. The submission further indicates that the Proposed Signs are intended solely for

identification purposes and are static in nature, with no flashing, animated, or changing-copy components identified elsewhere in the rationale (Attachment 3, p. 16).

The Applicant also notes that all structural supports, anchoring methods, and material selections will comply with applicable safety codes and municipal guidelines, and that the Proposed Signs are located outside visibility triangles and will not create hazards at intersections, crosswalks, or driveway access points (Attachment 3, p. 16). Supporting drawings identify the proposed location of the signs on the north elevations of the building and provide sign location plans and elevation details (Attachment 3, pp. 23-25).

Based on the review of the available information, including the requested deviations from the mandatory requirements of the Sign By-law, staff have determined that there is no reasonable basis for concern related to public safety arising from the Proposed Signs. As such, the CBO is of the opinion that this criterion has been met.

Section 694-30A(6): The Proposed Sign is not a sign prohibited by §694-15B

According to staff review, the Applicant's documents and drawings contains sufficient information to confirm that neither of the Proposed Signs meet the description of the signs which are specifically prohibited under §694-15B.

As such, the CBO is of the opinion that this criterion has been established.

Section 694-30A(7): The Proposed Sign does not alter the character of the premises or surrounding area

The Applicant describes Queen's Quay Terminal as a historically significant mixed-use building within Toronto's waterfront area and submits that the Proposed Signs have been designed to reinforce, rather than change, the building's identity and role within the public realm. They assert that the Proposed Signs are appropriately scaled to the façade, respect the architectural integrity of the building, do not obscure architectural features, and are designed using materials and forms intended to complement the character of the property (Attachment 3, pp. 12, 15).

The Applicant submits that the Proposed Signs reflect the building's historical precedent for prominent signage, including former rooftop identification signs, while providing a contemporary form of building and tenant identification (Attachment 3, pp. 10, 12-13). In support of this position, the submission includes site photographs, context renderings, site plans, elevation drawings, historical photographs of 207 Queens Quay, and examples of signage on other heritage and historic buildings (Attachment 3, pp. 10, 19).

Staff note that while the submission references examples of signage on other heritage and historic buildings, it provides limited information regarding the approvals associated with those signs, including whether variances were required, the planning and heritage considerations that informed the approvals, or whether they were approved under circumstances comparable to the current proposal. As a result, staff are unable to determine the extent to which the examples are comparable and have afforded them limited weight in the evaluation of this application. Furthermore, references to signage

approved on other properties are not determinative, as each variance application must be evaluated on its own merits and based on its specific context.

The Applicant submits that the examples illustrate that heritage and historic buildings can effectively incorporate signage where it is appropriately designed and respectful of architectural integrity, noting that the Proposed Signs are sensitive to these principles (Attachment 3, p.12). However, no Heritage Impact Assessment or comparable heritage analysis was submitted to demonstrate that the Proposed Signs would be respectful of the heritage character of 207 Queens Quay.

From a heritage perspective, the Proposed Signs do not reflect the building's historic architectural composition. The location, and mounting requirements associated with the Proposed Signs are not consistent with heritage conservation objectives and may result in physical impacts to the building.

Staff further note that while the surrounding area contains a mix of uses, commercial signage in the adjacencies is generally concentrated at the first and second storeys in accordance with CR Sign District performance standards. By contrast, the Proposed Signs would be substantially larger and higher than surrounding signage, representing a departure from the established pattern. Similar concerns were also raised through public submissions, which expressed that the Proposed Signs would alter the appearance of both 207 Queens Quay and the waterfront area and are not in keeping with the established character of the neighbourhood.

Moreover, numerous submissions received during the consultation period raised concerns regarding visual impact, heritage character, light trespass, and the relationship of the Proposed Signs to the surrounding waterfront environment (Attachment 4). These concerns reinforce staff's view that the Applicant has not sufficiently demonstrated that the proposal would advance the broader public interest objectives reflected in the Sign By-law and Official Plan.

Given these considerations, it is the opinion of the CBO that this criterion has not been satisfied.

Section: 694-30A(8): The Proposed Sign is not contrary to the public interest

The Applicant describes the building as a heritage-designated landmark and waterfront destination and asserts that enhanced visibility will support existing tenants, improve leasing opportunities, and strengthen the property's role within the waterfront area. The rationale states that Queen's Quay Terminal has experienced tenant losses, reduced foot traffic, and diminished public engagement in recent years, and submits that improved signage will contribute to the long-term viability of the property (Attachment 3, p. 16). The Applicant further submits that the Proposed Signs will encourage public engagement with the site, improve wayfinding, contribute to the pedestrian experience along Queens Quay West, and enhance the cultural, economic, and architectural presence of the building. Their submission concludes that these outcomes are in the public interest and align with broader community and waterfront objectives (Attachment 3, pp. 1, 4, 5, 9, 16).

Staff acknowledge that improved site identification may provide benefits to 207 Queens Quay and its occupants. However, economic considerations, business performance, and leasing opportunities are not among the criteria established under §694-30A of the Sign By-law and are not determinative of whether a variance should be granted.

In assessing the public interest, staff have considered the broader public objectives reflected in the Sign By-law and Official Plan. As discussed elsewhere in this report, the Applicant has not demonstrated that the Proposed Signs are compatible with the surrounding waterfront context, support the applicable heritage objectives of the Official Plan, would not adversely affect adjacent premises, or would not alter the character of 207 Queens Quay and surrounding area. Staff further note that no heritage impact assessment or similar analysis was submitted to demonstrate how the proposal would conserve the cultural heritage value and attributes of the property while accommodating signage of the proposed scale and location.

Accordingly, the CBO is not satisfied that the Applicant has demonstrated that the Proposed Signs would not be contrary to the public interest, and this criterion has not been established.

CONCLUSION

The Applicant's materials submitted, even when considered together with staff's review, research, and investigation, have not provided sufficient information for the CBO to establish that all eight criteria required to grant an approval for the requested variances for the Proposed Signs have been met.

As such, the CBO is not supportive of the Sign Variance Committee granting the requested variances for the Proposed Signs.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Description of Sign Variance

Attachment 2 – Appeal Submission Package

Attachment 3 – Sign Variance Submission Package

Attachment 4 – Interested Parties Communications

Attachment 5 – CBO's Decision Notice