

170 Merton Street - Demolition of a Heritage Attribute under Section 34 of the Ontario Heritage Act and Authority to Amend 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: Ward 12 - Toronto-St. Paul's

SUMMARY

This report recommends that City Council approve the demolition of a heritage attribute of the property at 170 Merton Street under Part IV, Section 34 of the Ontario Heritage Act, in connection with the proposed redevelopment of the site and grant authority to amend 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 connection 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 conservation strategy proposed through the redevelopment was previously approved by City Council through item TE27.13.

This report seeks further approval for the demolition, reconstruction and extension of the original terrace, a heritage attribute of the property that was previously proposed to be conserved in situ. Staff is of the opinion that the revised proposal continues to conserve the heritage property and remains consistent with the policy framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council consent to the application to demolish, by way of deconstruction and salvage, the terrace at the designated property at 170 Merton Street, under Part IV, Section 34(1)1 of the Ontario Heritage Act in accordance with the Heritage Impact Assessment Addendum dated March 31, 2026 prepared by ERA Architects Inc. and on file with the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning all satisfactory to the Senior Manager, Heritage Planning.
2. City Council authorize the City Solicitor to introduce the necessary Bill in Council authorizing the amendment of the Heritage Easement Agreement for the property at 170 Merton Street.

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 December 16 and 17, 2025, City Council approved the application to amend the Zoning By-law to permit a 141.3-metre (45-storey), excluding mechanical penthouse, mixed-use building with 531 dwelling units and 198.3 square metres of ground floor retail space at 170 and 180 Merton Street. City Council also approved the related application to amend the Official Plan to secure non-residential uses in lieu of office replacement.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.TE27.12>

On December 16 and 17, 2025, City Council approved 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 the mixed-use development.

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.TE27.13>

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 amended 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 demolished, salvaged, reconstructed, and extended, and will 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

The related Council-approved development application is for a 45-storey mixed-use residential building, which includes the retention of a portion of the VHA Building. The conservation strategy associated with the redevelopment was approved by City Council through item TE27.13 on December 16 and 17, 2025.

Since those approvals were granted, the conservation strategy has been revised. Previously the original raised terrace, a heritage attribute of the property identified in the designation by-law, was proposed to be retained in situ. Further investigation by a structural engineer has identified a conflict between the terrace's location and construction requirements for the proposed underground parking garage. The terrace's foundation is supported by 1000mm caissons buried adjacent to its east retaining wall.

Removal of the caissons, required to accommodate the proposed underground parking garage, would destabilize the terrace, making it structurally unsound. To address this concern, the revised conservation strategy proposes to dismantle the existing terrace and retaining walls, and reconstruct them in kind, in their original locations, following the construction of the underground parking.

The heritage impact of the proposed demolition of a heritage attribute will be mitigated. The existing terrace and retaining walls will be thoroughly documented prior to dismantling to ensure accurate in-kind reconstruction. The terrace will be reconstructed using salvaged materials, so that it closely matches the appearance of the original.

The revised proposal also involves extending the existing terrace situated along the west wall of the building, along with its east retaining wall, northward beyond its current extent, to connect the terrace to the new building to the north. This extension is proposed to eliminate an undesirable enclosed sunken void between the existing raised terrace and the new building. The extended portion of the terrace is in a location where it will be minimally visible from the public realm and will have a minimal heritage impact.

Staff recommend that the Heritage Easement Agreement be amended to permit the demolition of the terrace and to secure its reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

Staff have no concerns with the revised conservation strategy and the demolition of a heritage attribute in order to ensure the long-term structural integrity of the reconstructed terrace. Staff are of the opinion that the revised proposal conserves the cultural heritage values, attributes and character of the VHA Building and is appropriate within the overall conservation strategy for the site. 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 the demolition of a heritage attribute at 170 Merton Street under Section 34 of the Ontario Heritage Act and authority to amend a Heritage Easement Agreement.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

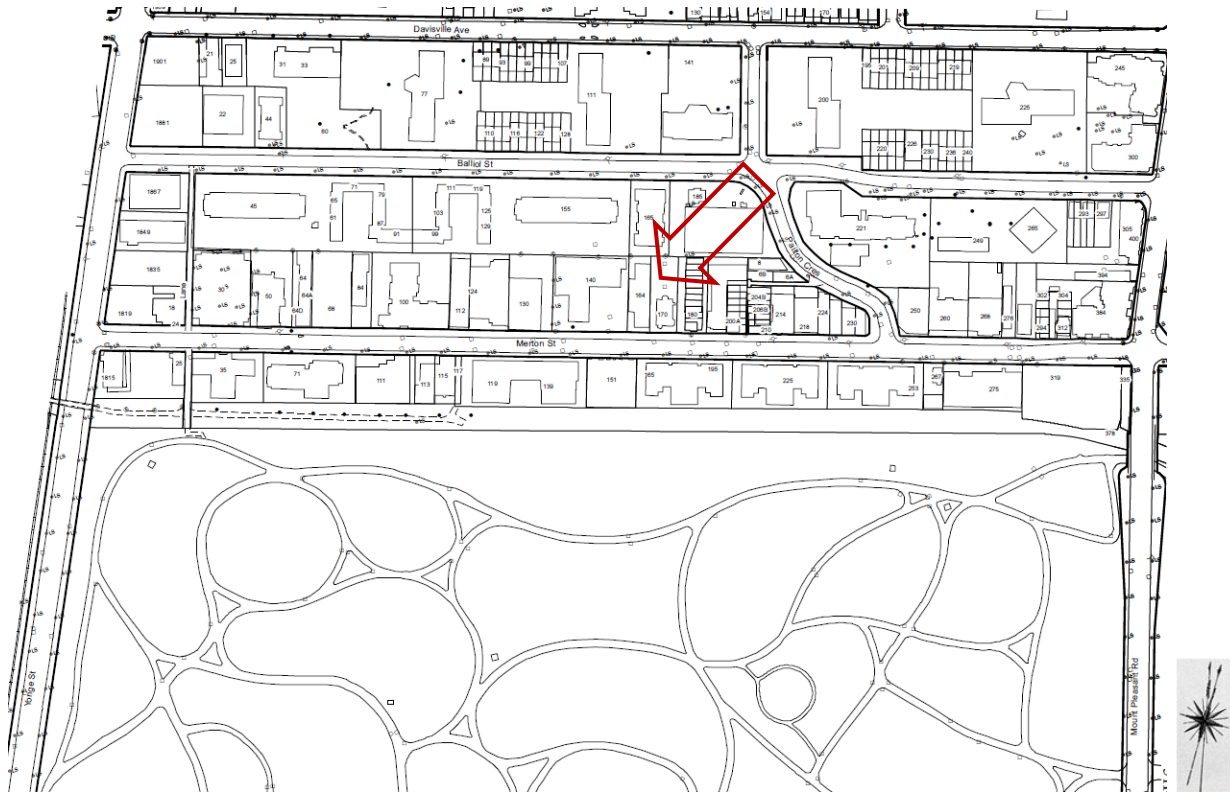
Mary L. MacDonald, MA, CAHP
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ATTACHMENTS

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

LOCATION MAP
170 MERTON STREET

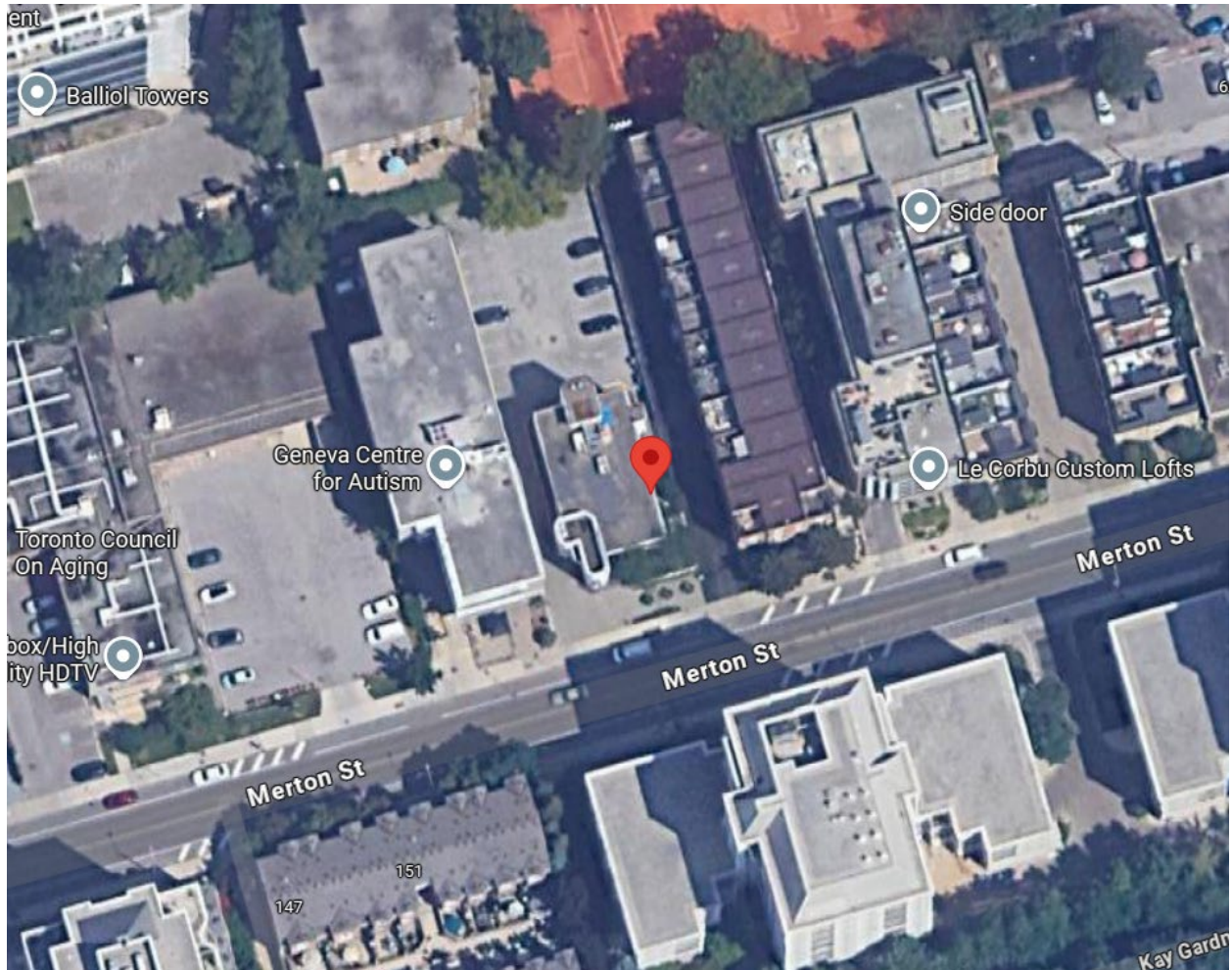
ATTACHMENT 1



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).

170 MERTON STREET



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



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



Image 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)



Proposed view of principal (south) elevation from the street, with a white arrow indicating the terrace retaining wall to be reconstructed (Turner Fleischer, 2025; annotated by ERA)

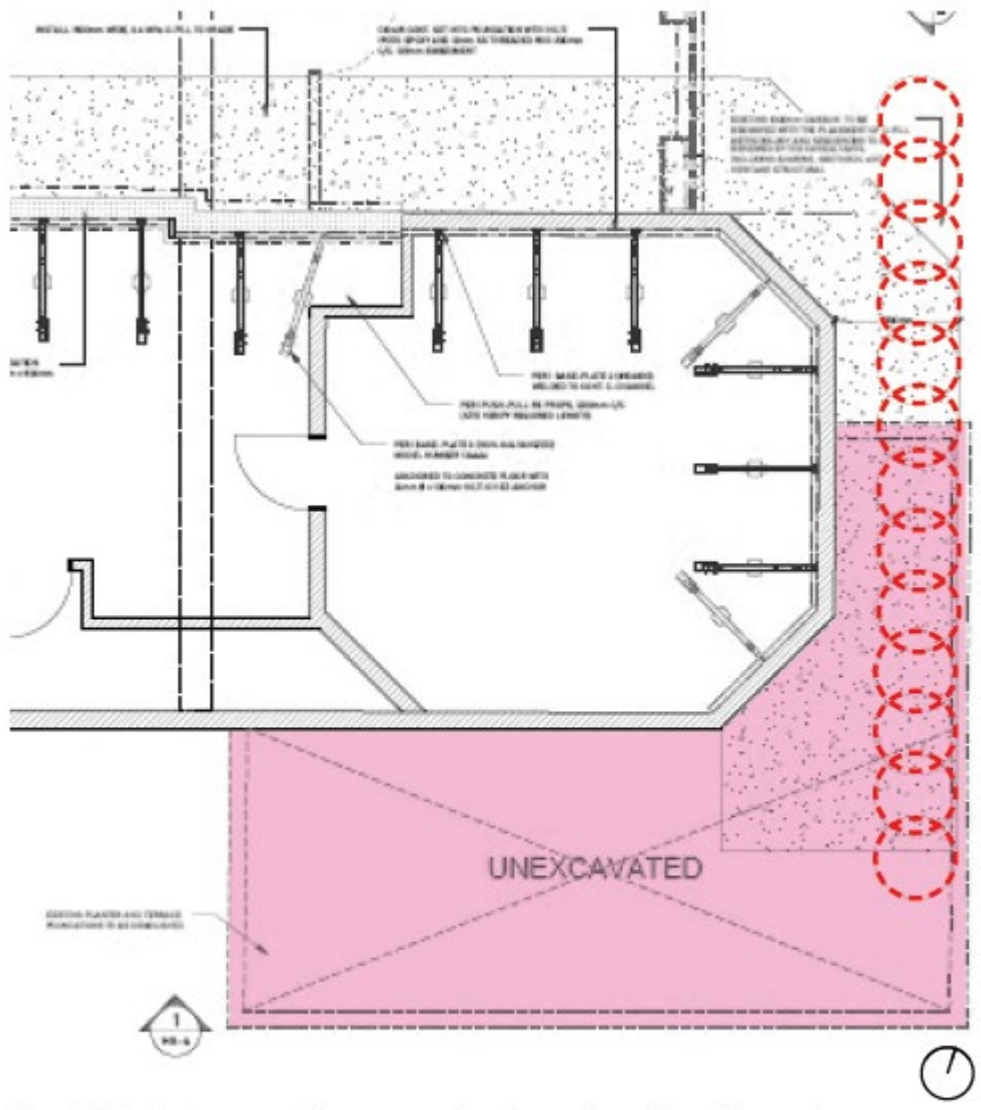


Fig. 3. Existing underground plan, showing the caissons in red, buried adjacent to the east retaining wall of the terrace, highlighted in pink (Facet Group, 2026; annotated by ERA).

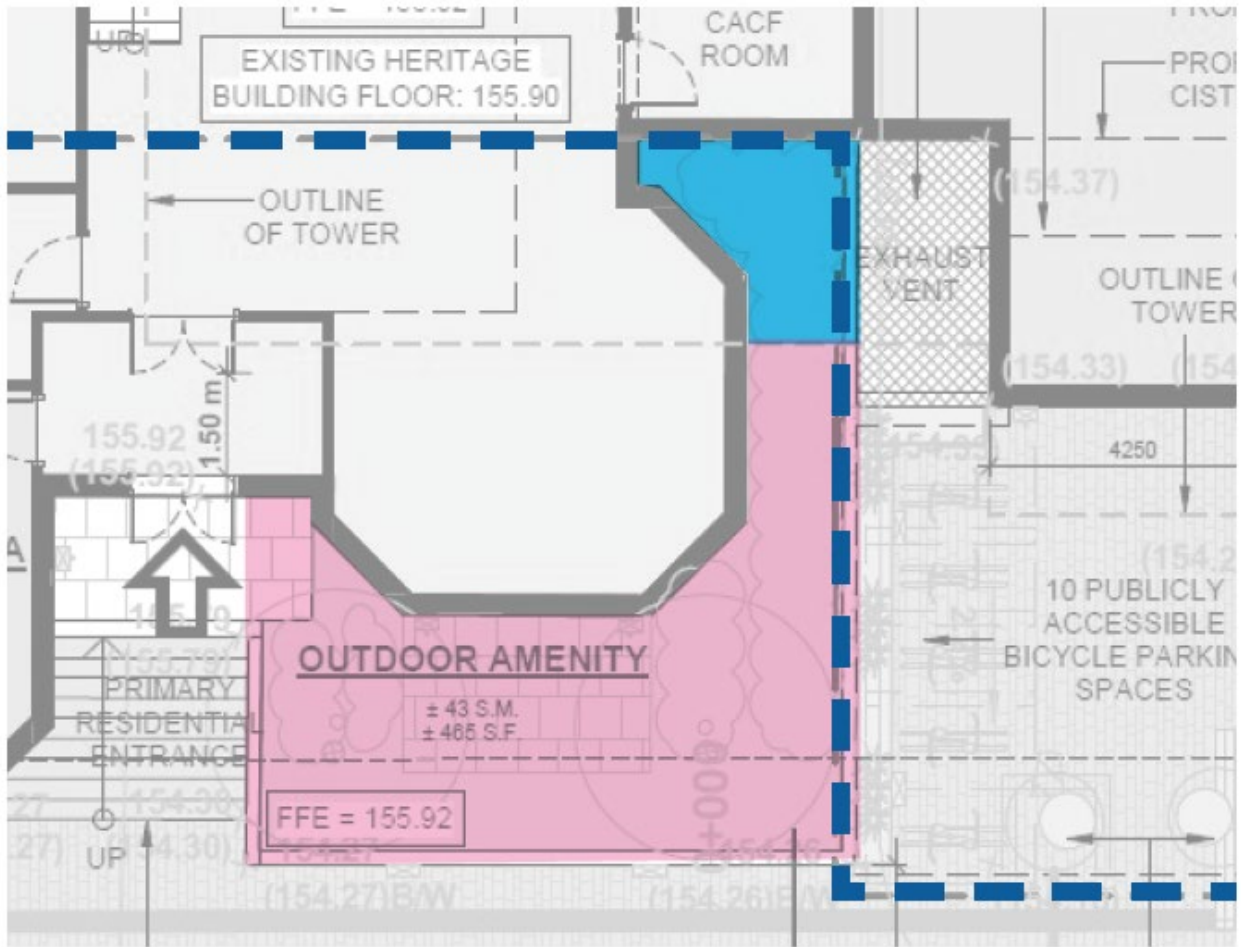


Fig. 4. Proposed ground floor plan, showing reconstructed terrace in pink, terrace extension in blue, and the southern extent of the underground parking area as a dotted blue line (Turner Fleischer, 2025; annotated by ERA).