

Subject: Application for new construction at 311 Somerset Street West and 234-236 O'Connor Street, properties designated under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* located in the Centretown Heritage Conservation District

File Number: ACS2022-PIE-RHU-0016

Report to Built Heritage Sub-Committee on 10 May 2022

and Planning Committee on 26 May 2022

and Council 8 June 2022

Submitted on April 21, 2022 by Court Curry, Manager, Right of Way, Heritage and Urban Design Services, Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development Department

Contact Person: Ashley Kotarba, Planner II, Heritage Planning Branch

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Ward: SOMERSET (14)

Objet : Demande de construction au 311, rue Somerset Ouest et aux 234 et 236, rue O'Connor , des propriétés désignées en vertu de la partie V de la *Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario* et situées dans le district de conservation du patrimoine du centre-ville

Dossier : ACS2022-PIE-RHU-0016

Rapport au Sous-comité du patrimoine bâti le 10 mai 2022

et au Comité de l'urbanisme le 26 mai 2022

et au Conseil le 8 juin 2022

Soumis le 21 avril 2022 par Court Curry, Gestionnaire , Services des emprises, du patrimoine et du design urbain, Direction générale de la planification, de l'immobilier et du développement économique

Personne ressource : Ashley Kotarba, Urbaniste II, Planification du Patrimoine

613-580-2424,23582, Ashley.Kotarba@ottawa.ca

Quartier : Somerset (14)

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Built Heritage Sub-Committee recommends that Planning Committee recommend that Council:

- 1. Approve the application for new construction at 311 Somerset Street West and 234-236 O'Connor Street according to plans prepared by Figurr-Architects Collective, dated March 28, 2022;**
- 2. Delegate the authority for minor design changes to the General Manager, Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development Department;**
- 3. Approve the issuance of the heritage permits for each application with a three-year expiry date from the date of issuance unless otherwise extended by Council.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Sous-Comité du patrimoine bâti recommande au Comité de l'urbanisme de faire les recommandations suivantes au Conseil :

- 1. Approuver la demande de construction au 311, rue Somerset Ouest et aux 234 et 236, rue O'Connor, conformément aux plans préparés par Figurr-Architects Collective et datés du 28 mars 2022;**
- 2. Déléguer au directeur général de Direction générale de Planification, Immobilier et Développement économique le pouvoir d'apporter des changements mineurs aux plans reçus;**
- 3. Approuver les demandes de permis en matière de patrimoine, valide pendant trois ans à compter de la date de délivrance, sauf si le permis est prolongé par le Conseil municipal.**

BACKGROUND

The properties at 311 Somerset Street West and 234-236 O'Connor Street are all vacant properties located at the northwest corner of Somerset Street West and O'Connor Street. The properties were designated as part of the Centretown Heritage Conservation District (HCD) under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1997. (Document 1 and 2)

All three properties once contained Victorian houses and were demolished in varying years. The houses on 311 Somerset (formerly 238 O'Connor/309 Somerset Street West) and 236 O'Connor Street were demolished prior to the HCD designation, and 234 O'Connor Street was demolished in 2018. Council approved the demolition in 2016.

The Heritage Planning Branch is currently undertaking the [Centretown Heritage Study](#), which included an updated inventory of all properties within the HCD boundary. The project is nearly complete, with a new Centretown HCD Plan that will be before the committee in the coming months. As the properties are vacant, the properties are recommended to be considered "non-contributing".

The Centretown HCD was designated for its cultural heritage value as a late 19th and early 20th century residential community within walking distance of Parliament Hill. The Statement of Cultural Heritage Value notes that the "area is unique both as an early residential suburb, and as the temporary and permanent home of many of those who have governed and shaped the nation." It features one major commercial artery, Bank Street, with the highest concentration of historic commercial buildings, unified by the dominance of red brick and wood materials (see Statement of Heritage Character in Document 3).

This report has been prepared because new construction in a heritage conservation district designated under Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* requires the approval of City Council. This proposal requires an Official Plan Amendment, Zoning By-law Amendment and an application for Site Plan Control, all of which have been submitted concurrently.

DISCUSSION

This application is for the construction of an 18-storey (58.2 metres) residential building over the three properties. The proposed building will have a four-storey podium and a 14-storey tower including 156 dwelling units and ground floor commercial space. There will be a below-grade parking garage accessed from O'Connor Street (Document 4). The ground floor will be made up of glazing, divided by brick walls, with punched windows on floors two to four (Documents 5-6). The podium will be four-storeys in height and be clad in red brick. The articulation of the podium is inspired by the volumes found along the Somerset streetscape and includes some inset balconies. The tower will be set back 6.5 meters from Somerset Street and will be clad in grey metal panels and curtain wall glazing. A terrace is proposed on top of the podium and will be set back from the roof's edge. Balconies are proposed on the east and west elevations of the tower.

The proposed building will cover nearly the entire lot, with the largest setback along the neighbouring properties to the west and north. Accordingly, very little soft landscaping is proposed on the site. Street trees will be planted along O'Connor Street, and planters will be installed along the north property line, on the drive aisle's roof in order to mitigate any impacts. (Document 7)

The associated Zoning By-law Amendment is to address the request for additional height, a reduced rear-yard setback, a reduction in parking and relief from the Heritage Overlay. An Official Plan Amendment is also required to provide relief from the permitted height in the Centretown Secondary Plan and to permit the land-use designation of 'traditional mainstreet' across the entire site.

Recommendation 1 – New Construction

As part of the Centretown Heritage Conservation District study in 1997, City Council approved Heritage Conservation District Guidelines. The Guidelines in this document, along with the directions set out in the Centretown Community Design Plan, and the policies set out in the Official Plan including the Centretown Secondary Plan, serve as the basis for the evaluation of the proposed development. It is important to note that the planning context of the Centretown HCD has changed since the designation in 1997 when significant new development was not contemplated, and it was recommended that heights of new buildings in the area be capped at three to four storeys. As noted above, the Centretown Heritage Study is nearing completion and will propose a new HCD Plan for adoption by Council in the coming months.

Given that the existing HCD Guidelines do not contemplate high-rise development, but the Centretown Secondary Plan does, staff have focussed their review on ensuring that the base of the building is compatible with the character of the streetscape and the HCD and that the tower portion of the building includes appropriate transition to the surrounding historic context.

The HCD guidelines outline both general recommendations to inform how the area should change as well as specific guidelines based on building type. These recommendations emphasize and encourage the conservation of the HCD's cultural heritage value and attributes, while acknowledging that the HCD has and will continue to evolve over time.

Section VII.5.6 of the Guidelines are related to residential infill along existing residential area. These guidelines seek to ensure that infill projects respect the existing late 19th and early 20th century heritage character by balancing a design approach that is both sympathetic to the cultural heritage value of the HCD, but also contemporary and

distinguishable as being “new”. See Document 9 for the applicable guidelines and how this proposal satisfies them.

Staff recommend approval of the proposed residential building, as the podium’s design will reflect the character of the existing streetscape while also being clearly contemporary. This block of Somerset Street is known as Somerset Village, an intact streetscape with turn-of-the-century red-brick residences converted to commercial space. The podium has been designed to be compatible with this streetscape, by using red brick, punched windows and similar volumes.

By recessing the tower, the massing of the podium will echo the heights along the north side of Somerset Street West, acting as a bookend to the three and four-storey volumes at the opposite end of the block, at the corner of Somerset and Bank Streets. Although the proposal will be taller than the historically low-rise (typically between two and four storeys) scale of the buildings in the HCD, staff do not object to the increase in height given the corner lot condition and the generous setback along Somerset Street. The tower has been set in on all sides, creating a small footprint over the podium. In order to mitigate the increased height at the rear of the lot, the brick will wrap around the podium, and the podium will be set back 4.5m from the north property line with the one-storey drive aisle at 0.3m. The tower will be set back 1.5m from the podium (6m from the lot line), creating a small transition from the podium to the low-scale residential neighbourhood to the north. To further mitigate impacts, planters will be installed along the top of the drive aisle to add some greenery to the lot.

The new building will also re-establish the continuous streetscape on Somerset Street West and O’Connor Street by infilling the existing vacant lot. This is recommended in the Centretown HCD Study. Together with the chosen material palette of red brick, metal, and glass, as well as the use of elements such as traditional window designs and articulated massing, the building will integrate with the surrounding contributing properties, rather than call attention to itself.

Centretown Secondary Plan and Centretown Community Design Plan

The Centretown Community Design Plan (CDP) and Secondary Plan were approved by City Council in 2013 and address the conservation of the HCD while contemplating significant new development. Section 3.7 of the Centretown Secondary Plan requires that new development in the HCD consider the heritage policies included in Section 6.5 of the CDP.

The Centretown Community Design Plan has guidelines for new buildings in the HCD, including: using stepbacks to appropriately transition to adjacent building heights, using compatible materials, giving predominance to corner elements, and modulating façades

through the use of inset balconies in a manner that is compatible with the surrounding heritage structures. The proposal meets the policies in Section 3.7 of the Secondary Plan and Section 3.5 of the CDP as the building's tower is set back on all sides, uses brick on the podium as a compatible material to the streetscape, and modulates of the volume through inset balconies to relate to the neighbouring buildings.

Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada

City Council adopted Parks Canada's Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada ("Standards and Guidelines") in 2008. This document establishes a consistent set of conservation principles and guidelines for projects involving heritage resources. Heritage staff have reviewed this proposal against this document and are satisfied that the project meets the relevant standards and guidelines.

The following Standards are applicable to this proposal:

Standard 1: Conserve the heritage value of an historic place.

Standard 11: Conserve the heritage value and character-defining-elements when creating any new additions to an historic place or any related new construction. Make the new work physically and visually compatible with, subordinate to and distinguishable from the historic place.

The subject properties are currently vacant and therefore have little cultural heritage value within the HCD. By providing ground floor commercial uses and upper floor residential, the proposed building maintains the associative cultural heritage value of the Centretown HCD, as the residential area surrounding Parliament Hill. The new construction will be visually compatible in terms of material palette with the HCD and clearly distinguishable from the surrounding historic buildings in form, massing and details. While not subordinate in size, the podium has been carefully designed to respond to the character of the area, while the tower has been set in on all sides and clad in different materials as not to draw attention to itself. Accordingly, the proposal meets the applicable Standards and Guidelines.

Cultural Heritage Impact Statement

Section 4.6.1 of the existing City of Ottawa Official Plan and 4.5.2 (2) of the Council approved New Official Plan requires that a Cultural Heritage Impact Statement (CHIS) be submitted where a proposed development has the potential to adversely affect the heritage resource. A CHIS was prepared for this proposal by Commonwealth Historic Resource Management and is attached as Document 8. Heritage staff have reviewed

the document and have determined that it meets the requirements of the City's Guidelines for CHISs.

The CHIS concludes that:

In conclusion, it is the author's opinion that the 18-storey development will impact the low-rise heritage character of the heritage conservation district. This is mitigated in part by the development's location at the northern edge of the district where taller buildings are part of the skyline, the use of red brick, and the podium designed as an integral part of the Somerset Village streetscape.

The aerial view illustrates the development in relation to its surroundings. The use of red brick is a character defining feature as are the end gable low rise house form along both sides of Somerset Street with more substantial buildings defining the intersections at Bank and at O'Connor Streets. The removal of the canopy over the 4th floor balconies creates notched eave and emphasizes the two-bay character of the podium.

Heritage staff generally concur with the findings of the CHIS.

Conclusion:

Staff recommend approval of the application for new construction as the proposal meets the applicable heritage guidelines of the Centretown HCD study and Parks Canada's Standards and Guidelines. The new construction will make a positive contribution to the streetscape in this section of Somerset Street West and will result in the removal of unattractive and under-developed vacant lots.

Recommendation 2 Minor Design Changes

This recommendation is included to allow Planning, Real Estate and Economic Development Department to approve these changes should they arise.

Recommendation 3 Heritage Permit Expiry

The *Ontario Heritage Act* does not provide any timelines for the expiry of heritage permits. A three-year expiry date is recommended to ensure that the project is completed in a timely fashion.

Provincial Policy Statement

Staff have reviewed this proposal and have determined that it is consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement, 2020.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

The plans were posted on the City's Development Application website on April 5, 2022.

Heritage Ottawa was notified of this application on April 5, 2022 and offered the opportunity to provide comments.

The Centretown Community Association (CCA) was notified of the heritage permit application on April 5, 2022. Their comments are included as Document 10.

Neighbours within 30 metres of the property were notified of this application and offered an opportunity to comment at the Built Heritage Sub-Committee meeting.

COMMENTS BY THE WARD COUNCILLOR

The Ward Councillor is aware of this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications associated with implementing the report recommendations.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility implications associated with this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

This project addresses the following Term of Council Priorities:

- Thriving Communities: Promote safety, culture, social and physical well-being for our residents.

APPLICATION PROCESS TIMELINE STATUS

The statutory 90-day timeline for consideration of this application under the *Ontario Heritage Act* will expire on July 25, 2022.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 Location Map

Document 2 Current Context Photos

Document 3 Statement of Heritage Character

Document 4 Site Plan

Document 5 Elevations

Document 6 Renderings and Streetscape Perspectives

Document 7 Landscape Plan

Document 8 Cultural Heritage Impact Statement

Document 9 HCD Guidelines- Evaluation Chart


Document 10 Comments from the Centretown Community Association

DISPOSITION

Office of the City Clerk, Council and Committee Services, to notify the property owner and the Ontario Heritage Trust, 10 Adelaide Street East, 3rd Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5C 1J3) of Council's decision.

Document 1 – Location Map



		LOCATION MAP / PLAN DE LOCALISATION HERITAGE / PATRIMOINE	
D09-01-SOME311	22-0257-L		311 rue Somerset St. O.W.
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REVISION / RÉVISION - 2022 / 03 / 25			

Document 2 – Current Context Photos



View from Somerset Street West, looking north



View from O'Connor Street, looking west

Document 3 –Statement of Heritage Character

Centretown has always been a predominantly residential area, functionally linked to Parliament Hill and the structures of government. Over the past century, it has housed many individuals important to Canada's development as a nation.

The built fabric of this area is overwhelmingly residential. It is dominated by dwellings from the 1890-1914 period, built to accommodate an expanding civil service within walking distance of Parliament Hill and government offices. There is a wide variety of housing types from this period, mixed in scale and level of sophistication. It had an early suburban quality, laid out and built up by speculative developers with repetitive groupings.

There is a sprinkling of pre-1890 buildings on the north and south perimeters, which predate any major development. There are also apartment buildings constructed and redeveloped during the 1914-1918 period in response to the need to house additional parliamentary, military, civil service and support personnel. In the recent 1960-1990 period, the predominantly low-scale environment has been punctuated by high-rise residential development.

Over the past century, this area has functioned as soft support for the administrative and commercial activity linked to Parliament Hill. In addition to residences, it has accommodated club facilities, organizational headquarters, institutions, professional offices and transportation services, all associated with Ottawa's role as national capital. Conversely, many of the facilities that complement Centretown's existence as a residential community have traditionally been situated in the blocks between Laurier and Wellington, closer to Parliament Hill.

Centretown has one major commercial artery, Bank Street. This street predates the community of Centretown both as a commercial route and as the major transportation corridor between Parliament Hill and outlying areas to the south. Bank Street has always serviced the entire area, with secondary commercial corridors along Elgin Street, Somerset Street and Gladstone Avenue in select locations and time periods. The Bank Street commercial corridor broadens onto associated side streets in periods of intense pressure, then narrows back to the street itself with commercial activity in decline.

Centretown itself has always been an access route to Parliament Hill. There is a long-standing pattern of north/south movement through the area by outsiders. Over the years, this pattern has been supported by livery locations, streetcar routes and automobile traffic corridors. Long distance travellers have traditionally arrived on the transportation corridor that marks the south boundary of the area --originally the

Canadian Atlantic Railway and later its replacement, the Queensway. Travel within Centretown occurs east/west radiating from Bank Street.

As the federal government's residential quarter, planning initiatives in Centretown have been influenced by both federal and municipal authorities. Federal intervention in this area has established some of its unusual qualities such as the formal emphasis on the Metcalfe Street axis, early enhancement of its residential quality, and a number of its parks and services. The streetscapes have traditionally been enhanced by extensive public tree planting and other hard and soft landscape features, many of which have been in decline since the period of extensive tree removal in the 1930s and 40s. However, the scale and texture of the heritage streetscape are still discernable.

This area is unique both as an early residential suburb and as the temporary and permanent home of many of those who have governed and shaped the nation.

Document 6 – Renderings and Streetscape Perspectives



Corner of Somerset Street West and O'Connor Street, looking northwest



Somerset Street West, looking east



O'Connor Street, looking southwest

Document 9 – HCD Study Evaluation Chart

Section of HCD Study	Applicable Guidelines	Proposed alteration/comment
VII.5 Building Conservation and Infill Guidelines	1. The Centretown area has a dominant late-nineteenth century/turn-of-the-century character which established the essential residential and commercial aspect of the proposed District.	The proposed residential-use building will be constructed on existing vacant lots. The proposal will re-establish the streetscape on Somerset Street West and O'Connor Street. Its design will be sympathetic by setting the tower portion of the building back from the front façade, using compatible materials (red brick, metal, and glazing), and by referencing the District's turn-of-the-century characteristics, such as window patterns and articulated massing.
	5. Because of the relatively high number of demolitions, many streetscapes are now interrupted by vacant lots. It is important to encourage infill development, and to promote design which is sympathetic to existing types, and which re-establishes streetscape continuity.	This proposal will infill an existing vacant lot and re-establish two streetscapes.
VII.5.6 Residential Infill	1. All infill should be of contemporary design, distinguishable as being of its time. However, it must be sympathetic to the heritage	This proposal is contemporary in design; however, takes cues from the Victorian houses in the Somerset streetscape. The window treatment and articulation of the bays are taken from the neighbouring properties. By recessing the tower, the focus

	<p>character of the area and designed to enhance these existing properties rather than calling attention to itself.</p>	<p>of the building is on the four-storey podium and its relationship to the surrounding buildings.</p>
	<p>2. The form of new infill should reflect the character of existing buildings on adjoining and facing properties. The buildings should normally be three or four storeys in height, with massing and setbacks matching earlier rather than later patterns still evident in the immediate area.</p>	<p>While the proposal is taller than the three to four storeys recommended in the HCD Study, the podium has been designed to respond to this guideline. The podium is four storeys in height, matching the corner properties on the west side of the block, at Bank Street. With the addition of this proposed building, it will act as a book end to an intact streetscape. The podium will be red brick and has taken design cues from other buildings in the streetscape. The podium will generally be aligned with the remainder of the properties in the block.</p>
	<p>3. Single family homes, rowhouses, and townhouse developments should reflect the rhythm of early lot development, with gables, balconies, or other features providing an appropriate scale. Small multiple-unit residential developments should reflect the U-shaped and H-shaped patterns of earlier examples, with emphasis on the entrances.</p>	<p>This proposal is not for a small multiple-unit residential building but will be a high-rise development. The podium was designed to focus on the connection to the HCD, to be evocative of a small-scale residential building. In order to accommodate a tower, the podium was not designed in a U or H-shape, but rather shaped as a rectangle in order to re-establish a street wall along both Somerset Street West and O'Connor Street.</p>

	<p>4. Brick veneer should be the primary finish material in most areas, to maintain continuity with existing buildings. Trim materials would commonly be wood or metal; the details at cornices, eaves, and entrances should be substantial and well detailed. Colours should be rich and sympathetic to the existing patterns. Lighting should be discreet and can be used to highlight architectural features.</p>	<p>The proposed material palette for the podium reflects the traditional cladding through Centretown, which will help maintain the continuity with adjacent buildings along Somerset Street West. Trim details will be expressed in metal, including the banding above the ground floor windows, the balconies and window surrounds. The tower will be clad in metal panel, as to not draw attention to itself.</p>
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Document 10 – Comments from the Centretown Community Association



210 Gloucester Street
Suite 101
Ottawa, Ontario
K2P 2K4.

December 14, 2021.

Steve Gauthier,
Planner,
City of Ottawa,
110 Laurier Avenue West,
Ottawa, ON, K1P 1J1.

Re: 311 Somerset and 234-236 O'Connor

Dear Mr. Gauthier,

The Centretown Community Association has concerns about the new design for a high-rise at O'Connor and Somerset.

Since we last wrote to you about this proposal, the design has been revised — from bad to worse.

The previous proposal was a 16-storey building. In its review of that proposal, the Urban Design Review Panel (UDRP) objected to the height in the strongest terms. To quote the summary at the conclusion of the UDRP meeting, “We always thought this is a mid-rise site. Let us be very clear; we don’t believe this is a tower site.” And, “it is overwhelming. It is far too much density.”

How has the developer responded to the architects’ strong criticism of the height? The developer has *increased* the height. The building has gone from 16 to 19 storeys.

In the revised design, there are two substantive changes. First, on Somerset, the face of the building has become more imposing. The height of the pedestal which abuts the sidewalk has been increased from three to four storeys.

Second, for storeys five through nine, the south stepback has been increased to eight metres.

However, the top of the building, although taller, is unchanged in footprint and location. The south wall facing Somerset, on the top portion of the building, is exactly where it was before.

The UDRP complained strongly about that face of the building – about its massing and height. The new design keeps this face, which the UDRP said was too high, in exactly the same location relative to Somerset, but makes it even higher.

The design revisions utterly fail to address the UDRP's central argument. Indeed, the design changes worsen the big problem the UDRP criticized – the building's height.

The proposed design greatly exceeds the crucial Traditional Main Street zoning of Somerset Street, in violation of all relevant planning documents, including the Official Plan and the Centretown Secondary Plan.

This development would set a precedent dramatically altering the character of Somerset, allowing skyscrapers on or close to Somerset. As one UDRP panelist stated, "This sets a precedent for all other projects."

Somerset Street should not become a canyon of high-rises.

Much of the neighbourhood character is grand Victorian houses. The neighbourhood character must be respected.

This proposal disrespects neighbourhood character, all planning documents, urban-planning principles, community comments, and the City's committee of architects.

Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Mindy Sichel

President,
Centretown Community Association

c.c. Catherine McKenney, Councillor, City of Ottawa
Tim Beed, Fotenn Planning + Design, beed@fotenn.com