September 8, 2026

Brief to City of Ottawa

From: The Campanile Coalition

Re: Zoning By-law amendment: 1495 Heron Road

We are a coalition of former students who attended Notre Dame High School or St. Patrick's High School between 1965 and 1973. We are committed to preserving the heritage integrity of three key elements of the original Campanile campus – the Quadrangle and free-standing bell tower – the Campanile, the Theatre and the Chapel. The Campanile campus was conceived by the Sisters of Notre Dame in the late 1960s and designed by the Ottawa architectural firm Murray and Murray, in collaboration with landscape architect Peter Coe. At the time, it was the only functioning all-weather campus in Ottawa, and an artistic landscape not to be found anywhere else in the Capital

Build Canada Homes is moving quickly to develop this property and provide much needed affordable housing. Our goal is to support a development plan that creates a new and dynamic community as initially envisioned by the Notre Dame Sisters while preserving the "spirit of space" for the site. [1]

We have prepared this short brief as a comment on the proposed Concept Plan for the building and development of the former Campanile campus and surrounding property listed generally as 1495 Heron Road and on the outstanding amendments proposed by Eric Bays, Senior Urban Planner on behalf of Stantec, a Canadian engineering consulting firm headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta.

This former Campanile Campus is protected as a heritage site.

There are actually **three relevant dates**, with respect to this protection, and the distinction is important:

- **January 17, 2023:** 1495 Heron Road was **listed on the City of Ottawa Heritage Register**. This was not yet a Part IV designation.
- **October 30, 2024:** Ottawa City Council approved issuing a **Notice of Intention to Designate** the Campanile Campus at **1485 and 1495 Heron Road under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act** and adopted the Conservation Design Guidelines for 1495 Heron Road.

- **February 12, 2025:** Council passed **By-law 2025-52**, formally designating the Campanile Campus, 1485 and 1495 Heron Road, **"to be of cultural heritage value or interest."** It is on this last date that the property received formal municipal heritage designation.

What exactly is protected?

The designation is considerably broader than simply protecting individual buildings. The **Statement of Cultural Heritage Value** identifies the Campanile campus as a unified Modernist campus and explicitly protects attributes of the **buildings, landscape, spatial organization, quadrangles, views and relationships between them**.

The City's wording under **"Description of Heritage Attributes — Overall Campus"** begins:

"Those attributes that reflect the Campanile Campus as a visually unified complex with a distinct sense of place reflecting Modern campus design"

It then identifies, among other things:

- the strong horizontality balanced by vertical elements including the **towers, campanile and chapel spire**;
- the common palette of red mottled brick, smooth white concrete and copper;
- the **"strong visual relationship between the buildings as well as the landscaped courtyards"**;
- the arrangement of buildings around courtyards and the interplay of indoor and outdoor spaces;
- exterior pathways and at-grade passageways;
- the **concrete campanile in the central courtyard**;
- the concrete-canopied campus entrance;
- the **"arrangement of three quadrangles, connected by concrete walkways, ramps, walls and steps"**;
- open lawns and intimate screened courtyards;
- landscape features including changes in topography, trees, shrubs, ground cover and limestone boulders;
- integrated benches and concrete planters;
- the **primacy of the chapel, around which the other buildings are arranged**; and

- the **axial view from the campus entrance toward the Chapel (Building A)**.

The City's Overview concerning heritage elements of its current building projects states:

"The conservation of cultural heritage resources is a priority for the City of Ottawa. Historic buildings, districts and landscapes provide us with physical reminders of our past and a greater understanding and appreciation of our local identity. The City of Ottawa conserves significant cultural resources to celebrate, revitalize, stabilize and enhance the community as well as to contribute to its physical, social, cultural and economic development."

In correspondence with Mary Jarvis on July 28, 2026, Mr. Bays defined the Concept Plan's main purpose. He wrote:

"While the Concept Plan results in additional housing and complementary uses, the design's intent is to integrate the community with the surrounding built context and environment."

In studying the proposed amendments that would impact this heritage designation, the composition of the Campanile Campus core from the 1960s (ZONE A) will be maintained along with the interior courtyard areas and pedestrian pathways and the axial view from the former campus entrance towards and terminating at the Chapel (building A). While buildings C and K (former nun's residences) will be demolished, buildings A, B, D. E, F, J and L will be maintained. Through the conservation of these buildings, the historic building materials and architectural features also will be retained. Based on the documents in our possession, our Coalition supports efforts to protect, highlight and enhance key elements of the former Campanile campus.

Our three principal concerns are the preservation of the Quadrangle, including the Campanile Bell Tower, the Theatre and the original Chapel. In studying the materials available to us, the designation and protection of heritage elements, protected under the City of Ottawa's Heritage designation, appear to be maintained. We would appreciate confirmation that our understanding of this proposed amendment proposal is indeed correct.

While their possible future uses have yet to be determined, we offer here comments and ideas which may be of assistance to planners.

A. The Quadrangle and free-standing bell tower (the Campanile).

The Quadrangle and the Campanile Bell Tower is described in the City of Ottawa letter to Ms. Jarvis (Appendix 2) under 'Design Value'.

"The concrete colonnaded entrance to the campus is highlighted by the namesake campanile, a prominent bell tower and the tallest structure on the site. The landscape design includes four courtyards, large limestone boulders, built in benches, trees and shrubs, and concrete walkways and steps."

For the students who attended Campanile, the quadrangle was a gathering place before and after classes and during the lunch break. It was also used as the location for graduation ceremonies with the chapel as a backdrop. The lawns were bordered with flowers and shrubs and the whole area could easily move from a scene of tranquility to a sea of humanity as the students flooded the area moving between classes. It is imperative that the Quadrangle with its imposing bell tower should remain a focus of all future development of the site, offering as it will, an area providing ample green space.

It is our belief that in the redevelopment of the site, the quadrangle could once again be a place of tranquility and a gathering space for the people who will live there. Small shops or other amenities could front the quadrangle to once again create a sense of community. Sections could even be set aside for small garden plots for residents to nurture.

B. The Theatre

Building F (the theatre) is explicitly identified as a heritage building to be retained. Building F, the original auditorium/theatre, is not simply noted as historically interesting; it is described as an **essential component** of the heritage campus.

The heritage attributes specifically identified for Building F include:

- its location at the front of the property, visible from Heron Road and flanking the campus entrance;
- its **octagonal form and heavy corrugated copper roof**;
- its mottled red-brick cladding and smooth concrete accents;
- its largely windowless south elevation;
- its raised, well-lit foundation on the north, east and west, creating the appearance that the building floats; and
- features reflecting its original auditorium use.

There is an important nuance, however: the designation document says that **interiors are generally excluded from the designation**, except for specified interior attributes of the Chapel. The strongest statutory protection of the theatre concerns its exterior form, location, massing and relationship to the campus rather than preservation of the entire

auditorium interior. Why then would we seek to renovate and renew the theatre to its former state and purpose?

The Campanile Theatre is described in Stantec, July 31, 2026, Heritage Impact Assessment: 1495 Heron Road, Ottawa, Ontario as follows: “Building F is an octagonal structure with a copper pyramidal roof. The structure is primarily clad in rough textured mottled red brick. The foundation of the structure is poured concrete. The structure has a basement level and a raised first storey. The basement level extends above ground. The basement has recessed windows within the poured concrete foundation. Above the basement is a smooth concrete band. At each point of the octagon, the structure has a projecting concrete decoration.”

However, their description fails to capture the significance of this structure as one of the most functional performance spaces in the City of Ottawa. Fashioned after the Stratford Festival Theatre in Stratford Ontario, though on a smaller scale, the auditorium was designed in a semi-circular fashion with a thrust stage that could be removed allowing the stage to revert to a proscenium arrangement. Seating capacity was 300 plus in a raked semicircular arrangement. A fully functional light and sound booth was located at the front of house area. The stage itself was sprung hardwood construction with adequate wings both left and right. There was rigging for lighting but no fly gallery. On the lower level were a band room with private rehearsal booths, make-up and costume areas and a large Green Room. It was, apart from the National Arts Centre, the most perfectly designed theatre in the City of Ottawa, and the students loved it.

In its day, the theatre was a dynamic performance space for theatrical performances, movie screenings, student assemblies, and presentations by musical guests. It was a hub of activity for student musicians, actors and theatre technicians and its lifelong contribution to the careers of many students. Among these young actors who went on to star in the entertainment business are Dan Aykroyd and Valri Bromfield who both performed as students on the Campanile Theatre Stage, and Maureen White, a Canadian theatre actor, director and playwright.

A key argument for the redevelopment of the theatre to its original state was highlighted in a recent conversation with Kathy MacLellan of ‘Rag and Bone Puppet Theatre Company’. That meeting reinforced the fact that there is a real and urgent need for additional performance and rehearsal space in Ottawa, particularly in Ottawa South. Apart from Meridian Theatres at Centrepointe and the Shenkman Arts Centre, in Orleans, there are few dedicated live performance venues south of the Rideau River. The renovated theatre on the Campanile campus property would address that need by providing an important cultural and performance space for the large and diverse population of Alta Vista ward and Ottawa

South as a whole. Indeed, some of our members would be enthusiastic about joining in a future campaign to achieve that goal.

C. The Chapel

The Conservation Design Guidelines identify the chapel and the central axis as the **"defining centrepiece of the heritage campus."** Indeed, it is the only building whose interior is expressly protected. "*The designation document says that **interiors are generally excluded from the designation**, except for specified interior attributes of the Chapel.*" The guidelines further state that all development must: *"Conserve the silhouette of the roof of Building A (Chapel) in the axial view looking north from the campus entrance at the entrance canopy."* This protects not merely the chapel building but its visual prominence and relationship to the entrance axis.

For Zone A, the City-adopted guidelines state that heritage buildings are to be retained and specifically require that any development *"Conserve Building A (Chapel), adjoining wings (Buildings L and B), and Building F as essential components of the Campanile Campus."* They also require that all development maintain the primacy of the axis running from the entrance and Building F north to the Chapel, including the three quadrangles surrounding it.

The adopted guideline again states: "*Conserve Building A (Chapel), adjoining wings (Buildings L and B), and Building F as essential components of the Campanile Campus*." It further asserts that the axial view from the campus entrance toward the Chapel (Building A) is one of the key attributes that reflect the Campanile Campus as a visually unified complex with a distinct sense of place reflecting Modern campus design. Indeed, the Conservation Design Guidelines use particularly strong wording for this attribute, describing it as essential as an *"Axial view from the campus entrance towards and terminating at the Chapel (Building A), creating an unimpeded view, including the silhouette of the roof."*

The designation therefore does **not** merely say, in effect, "save the chapel." The heritage value explicitly resides in defining the chapel as an essential part of a whole. It requires that we see and treat the **campus, including these three heritage elements, as a composition. One builds and enhances the other parts of the site**—its buildings, quadrangles, landscaped spaces, circulation routes, campanile, chapel and visual relationships.

That designation is directly relevant to the three elements of greatest concern to our coalition. It sets out clearly that **the Chapel and its axial view, the theatre, the**

quadrangles/campanile relationship, and the theatre are expressly identified heritage attributes.

Also important to our presentation, is the fact that when Council approved the designation process (February 12, 2025 and By-law 2025-52**)**, it simultaneously adopted the **1495 Heron Road Conservation Design Guidelines** "*for use in evaluating future applications under the Ontario Heritage Act for 1495 Heron Road*." The zoning contains a holding provision requiring a Heritage Impact Assessment demonstrating compliance with those Guidelines and any required *Ontario Heritage Act* permits before the hold can be removed.

In short, relying on the above, the City documents outline clearly the rules that must govern any future development of the site. These are:

Conserve Building A (Chapel), adjoining wings (Buildings L and B), and Building F as essential components of the Campanile Campus.
Conserve the silhouette of the roof of Building A (Chapel) in the axial view looking north from the campus entrance at the entrance canopy.
Conserve Building A (Chapel), adjoining wings (Buildings L and B), and Building F as essential components of the Campanile Campus.
Zone A should be maintained to highlight the central axis of the heritage campus as a key public space and centrepiece of the new site design.

Conclusion

The Campanile Coalition believes that any redevelopment of the former Campanile Campus must respect both the letter and the intent of the City of Ottawa's heritage designation. The designation recognizes the site as an integrated Modernist campus composition, in which the buildings, landscaped quadrangles, circulation routes, axial views and spatial relationships collectively contribute to its cultural heritage value. Accordingly, the Coalition considers the preservation of the Chapel, the Theatre, and the central quadrangle/Campanile ensemble to be fundamental to any acceptable redevelopment proposal. Particular care should be taken to preserve the historic central axis from the original campus entrance through the quadrangle to the Chapel, as well as the visual prominence, spatial relationships and landscape character that give the original campus its distinctive sense of place.

We have been asked why we are so passionate about preserving these three main elements of the Campanile Campus. To better understand what motivates the Campanile Coalition, we reference a recent Cardus Research report, *Enduring Faith Patterns of Religious Practice and Values Among Religious School Graduates*, by Lynn E. Swaner, Jonathan Eckert, and Albert Cheng, published in March 2026. The report states "findings

suggest that faith-based education has a lasting, formative role in graduates' lives." That finding has been confirmed by the choices and impact many of the graduates of Campanile Campus have made. Beyond the excellent academic curriculum delivered at Campanile, there was always a strong commitment to social justice for the poor and underprivileged both here in our own country and the wider world at large. In so many ways, these messages have carried on in the lives of the graduates and been demonstrated by the chosen fields of so many Campanile graduates: medicine, law, education, politics, journalism and writing, the arts, social programs and religious life. It is this "lasting formative influence" that drives the Campanile Coalition. We are more than just a group of former students with sentimental feelings. We see the potential to recreate the sense of community envisioned by the Notre Dame Sisters; one of caring and nurturing for both young families and elderly residents.

Respectively submitted by members of the Campanile Campus Coalition

Dr. Mark Reardon, Maureen McTeer, O.C., Francis Kenny, Debbie MacDonald-McGee, Don Ellis, Micheline Egan, Mary Ellen Fitzgerald.

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[1] Reference to "spirit of space" comes from Kathleen Chin, 2018 Master of Architecture thesis "The Potential of the Discarded: Creating Affordable Housing from a Vacant Modern Complex."