

Cultural Heritage Impact Statement

Construction of a new building at 215 McLeod Street

Centretown Heritage Conservation District

Submitted to:

Embassy of the Republic of Iraq

Property Address:

215 McLeod Street (Embassy of the
Republic of Iraq)

Prepared by:

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HCD:

Centretown Heritage Conservation
District

Introduction.....	2
Background Information	3
Site Location.....	3
Existing Property	3
Description of Undertaking.....	4
Heritage Impact Analysis.....	5
Centretown Heritage Conservation District Context	5
Guidelines for Infill	5
Impact Assessment	6
Provincial Policy Statement.....	7
Figures.....	8

INTRODUCTION

This Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) for 215 McLeod Street is authored by Julie Harris, Professional Member, Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals.¹ The subject property is located at 215 McLeod Street. It covers lots 3 and 4 McLeod Street, as well as the eastern portion of lot 5. The property registration number is PIN 04118-0255. The current owner (the Government of the Republic of Iraq) has applied to the City of Ottawa to demolish the existing structure on the property and to build a new embassy designed by Julian Jacobs Architects (Toronto). The new structure will be taller than the existing building and cover more of the property.²

The proposed embassy development at 215 McLeod Street is located within the City of Ottawa's Centretown Heritage Conservation District designated in 1997 under the *Ontario Heritage Act* by the City of Ottawa. The City of Ottawa's Heritage Planning staff has requested that a heritage impact assessment be conducted to comply with requirements of the City's Official Plan by examining the proposed development within the context of the District guidelines and the heritage provisions of the *Provincial Policy Statement*. In effect, the HIS considers both the intrinsic merits of the development and its impact on adjacent heritage properties.

The Centretown Heritage Conservation District Study (CHCDS) is the core document describing the heritage value of the district and the guidelines to be applied for interventions affecting the heritage value of the Heritage Conservation District.³ The CHCDS is supplemented by a detailed building-by-building survey and evaluation conducted at the time of the study. The existing Embassy building, erected in 1957 and modified several times, was evaluated as a Grade IV structure, which means that it was determined to be of little or no heritage significance within the context of the District. Since the existing embassy building does not have intrinsic heritage value, this HIS focuses exclusively on the proposed new embassy building.

¹ Julie Harris is principal of Contentworks Inc. She is a member of the Canadian Association of Heritage Professionals, with over 30 years of experience in heritage evaluation and historical research. She has been qualified as a witness in the field of heritage evaluation for the purposes of an OMB; served as a provincial appointee to the Conservation Review Board of Ontario; and conducted architectural histories for hundreds of buildings and landscapes for municipalities, private owners, and federal and Ontario public agencies.

² The CHCD is subject to a heritage overlay which is a provision that restricts the scale of redevelopment of a property in the District. One half of the property (lot 3) was vacant in 1978, which means that it is not subject to the overlay provisions. The proponent has asked to have the overlay requirements lifted for the entire redevelopment.

³ Other documents, such as the City of Ottawa's *Official Plan*, are also relevant to planning applications in the District. This Heritage Impact Statement, however, is focused on the impact of the new building on the heritage value of the District as defined in the CHCDS. All other planning issues are outside the scope of this report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

SITE LOCATION

The site of the proposed development is located at 215 McLeod Street between Elgin and Metcalfe streets (Figure 1, Figure 2 and Figure 3). The property is 44 by 30 metres (143 by 99 feet) in size, with approximately half of the property covered by an asphalt parking lot and the other half used for the embassy building, a one-storey garage and a security hut (Figure 4). The property is situated on the north side of the street across from the eastern edge of the Canadian Museum of Nature (Figure 5). The museum covers most of the south side of McLeod Street between Elgin and O'Connor streets. The Canadian Museum of Nature was purpose-built as Canada's first national museum. It is one of the most important landmarks in the City. Its heritage value has been assessed at the federal and national levels. It is a 'Classified' Federal Heritage Building (the highest level of heritage value) and a National Historic Site of Canada. Completed in 1911, the museum is a massive Tudor Gothic structure that was fully restored and rehabilitated in the early 2000s. A distinguishing feature of the museum is a prominent, brilliant multi-storey glass lantern and stairwell that was installed to take the place of the missing central tower of the building. The museum's location at the terminus of Metcalfe Street, which extends northward to Parliament Hill, also makes it an organizing influence on the southern end of the District.

The north side of McLeod (the same side as the embassy) is largely composed of two-storey houses converted to commercial buildings and some apartment buildings. The tallest structure is a 13-storey apartment building located immediately to the east of the Embassy (Figure 6). Older structures on the street include a four-storey apartment building at 191 McLeod Street (built c 1913-22) and dwellings on the north side of McLeod, such as 223 McLeod (built c 1879-1901) and 231 McLeod (built c1879-1901) (Figure 6, Figure 7 and Figure 8).

EXISTING PROPERTY

215 McLeod Street contains a two-storey (10 m) embassy building with a ground-floor plate area of 876 m² on the western portion of the property (Figure 4); an asphalt parking lot on the eastern portion of the property; a narrow garage running half the width of the site at the back of the parking lot; and a one-storey, concrete-block security hut located between the office building and parking lot (Figure 9). A utilitarian wrought iron fence rings the perimeter of the property. The embassy is set back approximately 4 metres from the street behind a narrow, treed boulevard. The setback is similar to the setbacks of all older buildings on McLeod in the two long blocks between Elgin and O'Connor streets.

The Embassy is a steel framed modern-era office building with a façade composed of manufactured windows and precast concrete panels. It is two storeys in height with a raised podium, a full height basement, a flat roof and a recessed atrium bay above the main entrance. The modern style is reflected in its rectangular geometry and massing, materials and openings. The east and west elevations are simply clad in grey brick. It is typical in

scale, materials and design quality to ubiquitous commercial blocks of its period found across Canada and elsewhere in the District. As noted above, it has been evaluated as a Category IV (little or no heritage) structure in the context of the District.

DESCRIPTION OF UNDERTAKING

The owner is applying to demolish all existing structures (office building, fence, guardhouse and garage) to build a larger structure with underground parking. Security features will be fully integrated into the materials, construction and entrances, thereby eliminating the need for a security hut. A steel fence will line the perimeter of the sides and rear boundary of the lot, while short stone walls will run on either side of the steps to the main entrance (Figure 10). The words “The Embassy of the Republic of Iraq”, in English and Arabic, will be mounted on the walls in stainless steel channel letters (Figure 11).

The proposed embassy is a Post-Modern⁴, four-storey, irregular-shaped building with a fifth-storey glass-faced penthouse (Figure 12). The proposed height, to the top of the parapet, is 19.5 m. The floor areas are as follows: ground Floor Plate Area – 729 sq m; second Floor Plate Area – 664 sq m; third Floor Plate Area – 639 sq m; and fourth Floor Plate Area – 368 sq m. The building is of steel-frame construction with multiple modules of varying dimensions. The modules are clad in a glass skin composed of double-glazed sealed units that will be highly textured by means of ceramic frit inserted between the layers of glass in a highly geometric pattern.

The complex pattern of modules assembled to create the design is inspired by the form of ancient ziggurats (Figure 13).⁵ Built upon a rectangular base with a projecting stone plinth and recessed central entrance, the building displays balance and proportion. Angled modules draw attention to the centre of the building creating an unexpected sense of symmetry despite its asymmetrical design. A carefully staged transition between the modules relieves the massing, while also rendering the structure as a single object. The composition will be visible from the upper storeys of the Museum of Nature (Figure 11). As seen from the streets, the façade and silhouette are strongly enlivened by the off-set pattern of modules and the impact of the terracing effect (Figure 14).

The façade is clearly identified by a commanding central entrance surmounted by a bas-relief depicting the famous lion hunt scene from the Palace of King Ashurnasirpal II. On the ground storey, the walls will generally run parallel to the McLeod Street. The twinned second and third storeys are divided into three modules, with a slightly askew centre

⁴ Situating contemporary architecture in stylistic categories is difficult, but the Post-Modern characterization seems appropriate in this case because the design clearly speaks to both contemporary design and historic architectural forms.

⁵ Ziggurats were massive ancient structures built in the ancient Mesopotamian valley and in other parts of what are now Iran and Iraq. They were normally built from clay in the form of a terraced, stepped pyramid on a buttressed base. See: http://www.mesopotamia.co.uk/ziggurats/home_set.html

section flanked by two taller sections. Unlike the ground storey, these walls do not run parallel to McLeod Street. Instead they are angled toward the centre of the building. The use of modules continues on the fourth storey and penthouse, and the east and west elevations. The walls on the west elevation are angled inward towards the centre of the building while the east elevation retains a straighter edge.

Underground parking will be provided on the east side of the building via a sloped driveway (on the property) from McLeod Street. Pedestrians access the building by the central steps leading to the main entrance, or the ramps running on along the eastern and western portions of the main elevation, hidden by the stone wall.

HERITAGE IMPACT ANALYSIS

CENTRETOWN HERITAGE CONSERVATION DISTRICT CONTEXT

GUIDELINES FOR INFILL

The property at 215 McLeod Street is located within the Centretown Heritage Conservation District designated in accordance with Part V⁶ of the *Ontario Heritage Act* in 1997. The CHCDS with management guidelines was prepared in 1996-97 by Julian Smith & Associates.⁷ The CHCDS demonstrated that the area identified within the boundaries of the District was significant for historical, architectural and environmental reasons. The CHCDS also described the area as having a “high concentration of residential and commercial buildings from the 1890-1914 period, with an additional important layer from the 1914-1948 intensification period.” Approximately 80% of the buildings, at the time of the District Study, “were four storeys or less in height, and set on narrow lots. They were richly detailed in brick, wood and sheet metal...” The Study pointed to an “instability” resulting from medium- and high-rise development in the area, as well as the number of empty lots. In creating the Centretown Heritage Conservation District through by-law in 1997, the City of Ottawa also approved a set of guidelines that were intended to strengthen the District’s cultural heritage value over time.

The following recommendations are selected from the Centretown Heritage Conservation District Study (1997) as being relevant to understanding the impact of the proposed undertaking (the construction of a new Embassy for the Republic of Iraq) may have on the District’s cultural heritage value:

⁶ Part V of the *Ontario Heritage Act* concerns districts only. Part IV concerns individual properties. The subject property is not designated under Part IV of the *Act*.

⁷ Julian Smith & Associates et al, *Centretown Heritage Conservation District Study* (Winter 1996-1997). The Study includes a history of the District, data sheets about all properties in the District, an analysis of the heritage value of the District, assessments of individual properties, and recommendations and guidelines concerning the District’s management.

VII.5.5 Commercial and Mixed Use Infill [Building Conservation and Infill Guidelines]

Appropriate infill design is critical to the long-term success of the heritage commercial corridors within the District. This infill must respect the existing heritage character by providing sympathetic contemporary design.

There has been a continuous process of construction, alteration, demolition and infill over the years. However, the dominant character of the area was set at the turn of the century, and the surviving buildings from this period still establish the best point of reference for the design of infill projects.

Recommendations

All infill should be of contemporary design, distinguishable as being of its own time. However, it must be sympathetic to the heritage character of the area, and designed to enhance these existing properties rather than calling attention to itself.

The form of new buildings should reflect the character of the area they are in, which will vary considerably along Elgin, Somerset, Gladstone, and other mixed use locations. In most cases, buildings should be two, three or four storeys in height, with a setback that matches adjacent properties. Floor levels should also match what exists, with grade level retail on streets like Elgin north of Gladstone, and raised floor levels in converted residential areas such as Somerset. In the latter case, split level retail may be feasible; such split retail should not be used in older commercial areas.

Materials and colours should ensure continuity in the streetscape.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The proposed development is located in a mixed block of new and old residential, institutional and commercial structures. The new Embassy will result in a sympathetic infill on a property that is partially covered by asphalt, a one-storey garage and a security hut, in addition to an office structure. The development will improve the appearance of the streetscape (on the north side) due to the quality of the design of the new building, which matches the setback and grade of adjacent properties and is carefully conceived to be of its own time (Figure 14).

The CHCDS determined that the scale had been previously lost on this section of the block on the north side of McLeod Street (CHCDS, Heritage Streetscape Evaluation: Building Scale map). The modest height of the proposed building (four storeys, within the recommended height for the district) will create a much-needed transition from the 13-storey apartment building on the east and the two-storey former house on the west (Figure 15). It will also re-establish a more continuous streetscape that was disrupted in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The Embassy is highly visible, due to its location on the Metcalfe Street turn that is used by many vehicles going north towards downtown (Figure 16). The new building will be distinguishable as an embassy due to the quality of its exterior finishes and form, while

simultaneously serving as a particularly graceful ‘flash of glass’ in advance of the striking view of the glass lantern of the rehabilitated Canadian Museum of Nature on the south side of Metcalfe Street.

The underground parking addresses the need to reduce at grade parking in the district (Guideline VII.4.11).

In sum, the new design meets the guidelines of the CHCD in its height, materials, finishes and massing. Further consideration could be given, however, to providing street trees on the City’s verge to add canopy to the narrow boulevard in front of the building.

PROVINCIAL POLICY STATEMENT

As previously noted, the building at 215 McLeod was not identified as a significant heritage structure in the Heritage Conservation District Study. Properties adjacent to the subject site, however, have been identified as such. The following section of the Provincial Policy Statement addresses development adjacent to significant cultural heritage and has been reviewed in the context of this proposed development.

2.6 Cultural Heritage and Archaeology from the Provincial Policy Statement

2.6.3 *Development and site alteration may be permitted on adjacent lands to protected heritage property where the proposed development and site alteration has been evaluated and it has been demonstrated that the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property will be conserved.*

Mitigative measures and/or alternative development approaches may be required in order to conserve the heritage attributes of the protected heritage property affected by the adjacent development or site alteration.

The most significant property that could be affected by the development is the Canadian Museum of Nature, which is a Classified Federal Heritage Building and a National Historic Site of Canada. The attributes of the structure and its environment are clearly articulated in statements of significance for both designations, which emphasize the function of the structure, its design and construction, and its placement at the head of Metcalfe Street.⁸ The proposed embassy will affect none of these attributes. From a broader perspective of the overall setting of the museum, the proposed Embassy will be a positive development. Located immediately across the street from the east wing of the museum, it will establish a confident echo of the museum’s dramatic glass lantern in its materials and shape. In addition, the quality of the new development, including the decision to put parking underground and to integrate and hide security requirements into each aspect of the design, will also contribute to a more elegant streetscape across from the museum (Figure 17).

⁸ Source: The Canadian Register of Historic Places accessed at www.historicplaces.ca, February 28, 2012.

FIGURES



Figure 1: Map showing 215 McLeod St. in centre. (City of Ottawa emap)

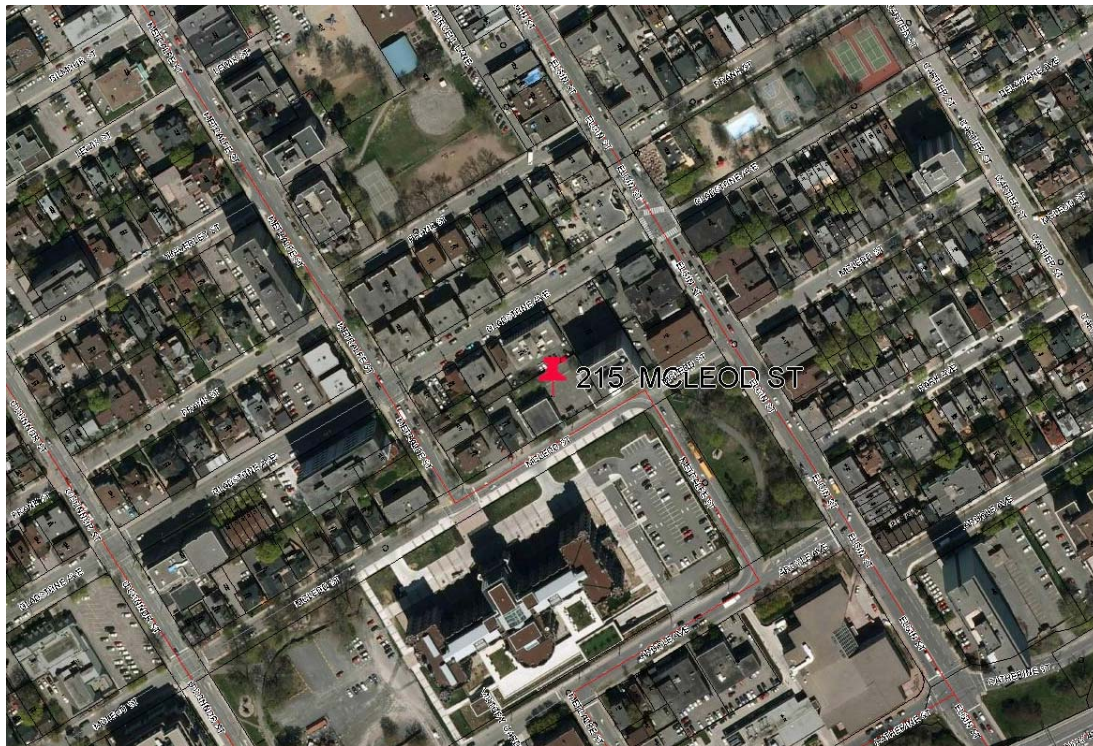


Figure 2: Aerial photo showing 215 McLeod St in centre. (City of Ottawa emap)

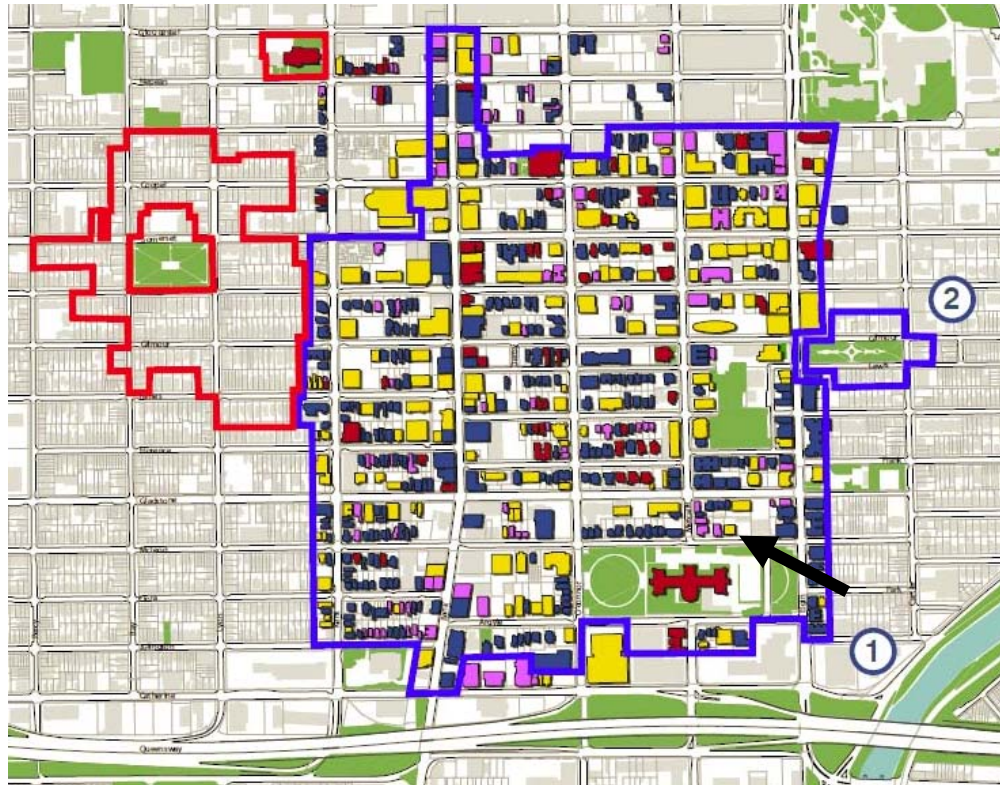


Figure 3: Map of the Centretown Heritage Conservation District. Group VI structures (little or no heritage significance) are shown in yellow. The arrow marks the site of the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq. (Community Design Plan)



Figure 4: The front elevation of the office building for the Embassy of Iraq on the western portion of the property at 215 McLeod Street. (Contentworks, 29 February 2012)



Figure 5: The Embassy of Iraq (right) across from the Canadian Museum of Nature with its glass lantern (left). (Google Street View)



Figure 6: 191 McLeod Street at the corner of Elgin Street. The Embassy of Iraq is at the far left side of the image. The 13-storey 1960s apartment tower is located between the corner building and the Embassy, 2009. (Google Street View)



Figure 7: 223 McLeod Street (left) and the Embassy of Iraq (centre). (Julian Jacobs Architects, 20 December 2011.)



Figure 8: 231 McLeod Street at the corner of Metcalfe, 2009. (Google Street View).



Figure 9: The guardhouse, fence, parking lot and garage on the eastern portion of the property at 215 McLeod Street, 2009. (Google Street View)

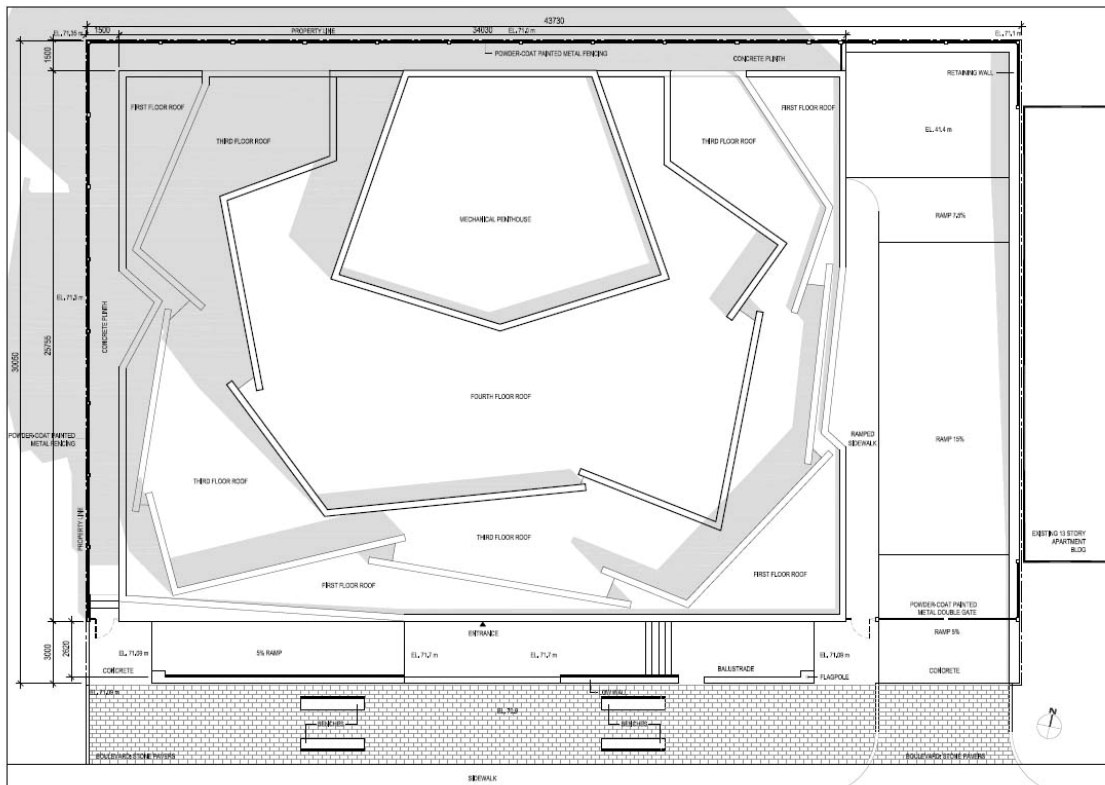


Figure 10: Conceptual site plan for the new development. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)



Figure 11: Perspective from above the southwest corner of the proposed embassy at 215 McLeod St., much like it would appear when seen from the second or third storeys of the Canadian Museum of Nature. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)

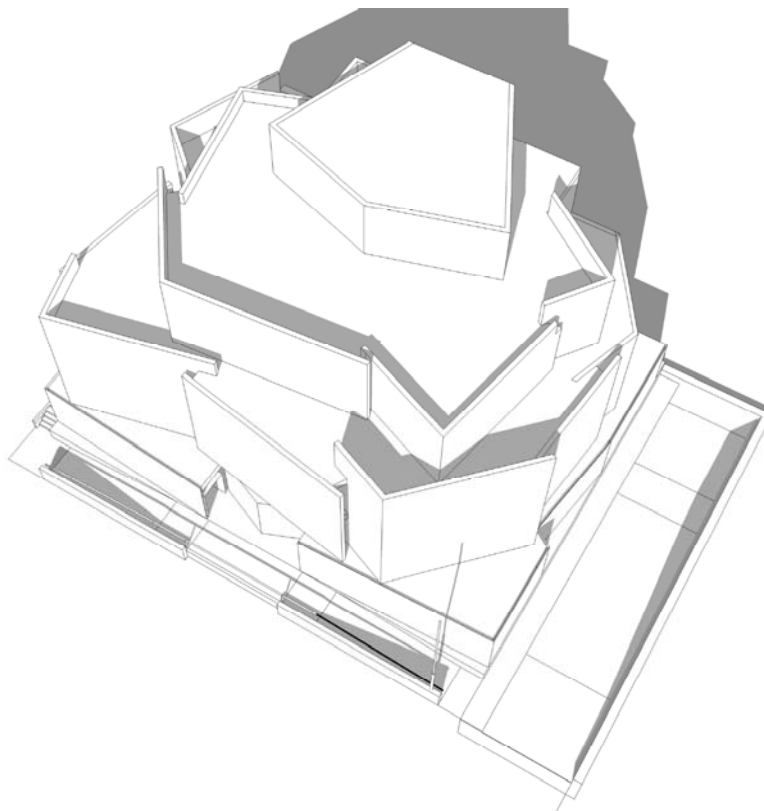


Figure 12: Aerial perspective of the proposed embassy at 215 McLeod St. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)

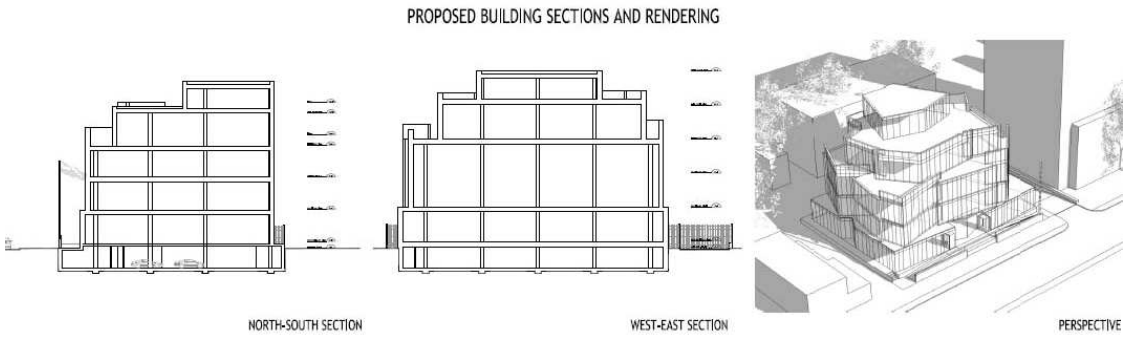
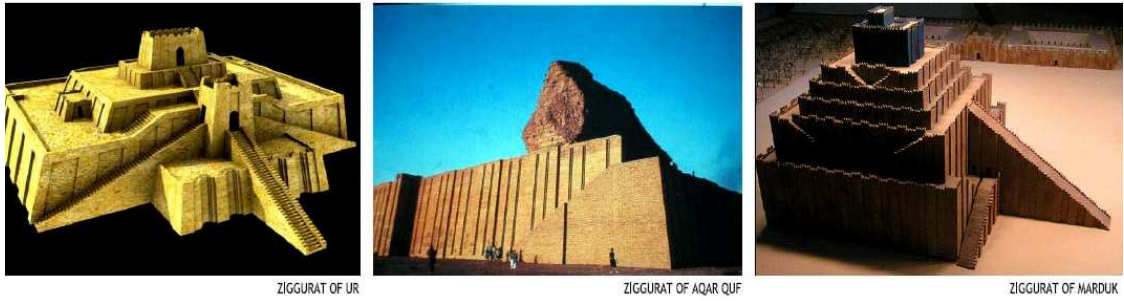


Figure 13: The stepped pyramid design of the proposed development was inspired by a Ziggurat. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)



Figure 14: Exterior perspective from ground level for 215 McLeod St. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)



Figure 15: Perspective from above of the southwest corner of the proposed embassy at 215 McLeod St and the adjacent properties. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)



Figure 16: Perspective from Elgin Street of the southeast corner for 215 McLeod St and the Metcalfe Street turn used by many vehicles traveling north towards downtown (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)

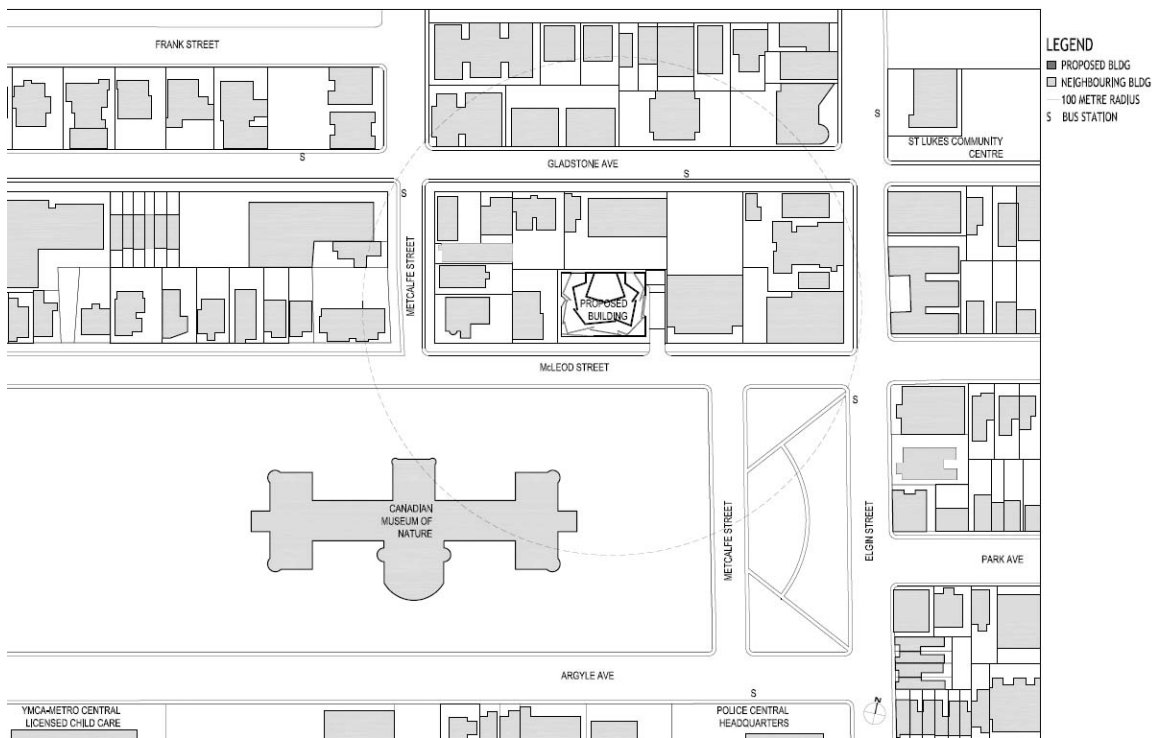


Figure 17: Context plan illustrating the proposed embassy at 215 McLeod St within its surrounding environment. (Julian Jacobs Architects, August 2012.)