

STAFF REPORT 03-10-2021 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

ADDRESSES: 1501-1567 CHURCH, 1606-1622 CHURCH, 1611 MICHIGAN* (*ADJACENT TO DISTRICT)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN HD

PROPERTY OWNER: OXFORD PERENNIAL CORKTOWN PROP LLC

SPONSORING CITY AGENCY/AUTHORITY: DEGC (DETROIT ECONOMIC GROWTH CORPORATION)

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 02-26-21

TODAY'S ACTION IS AN ADVISORY OPINION ONLY AND CANNOT APPROVE/DENY THE PROJECT, NOR CONSIDER A BUILDING PERMIT FOR ANY ALTERATION, CONSTRUCTION OR DEMOLITION. AN ADVISORY OPINION RENDERED BY THE COMMISSION DOES NOT BIND THE COMMISSION TO ANY FUTURE DECISION. SHOULD A PERMIT APPLICATION BE RECEIVED, THE COMMISSION WILL SCHEDULE, ADVERTISE, AND HOLD A PUBLIC HEARING PRIOR TO ANY DECISION OR ACTION FOR IN-DISTRICT PROPERTIES.

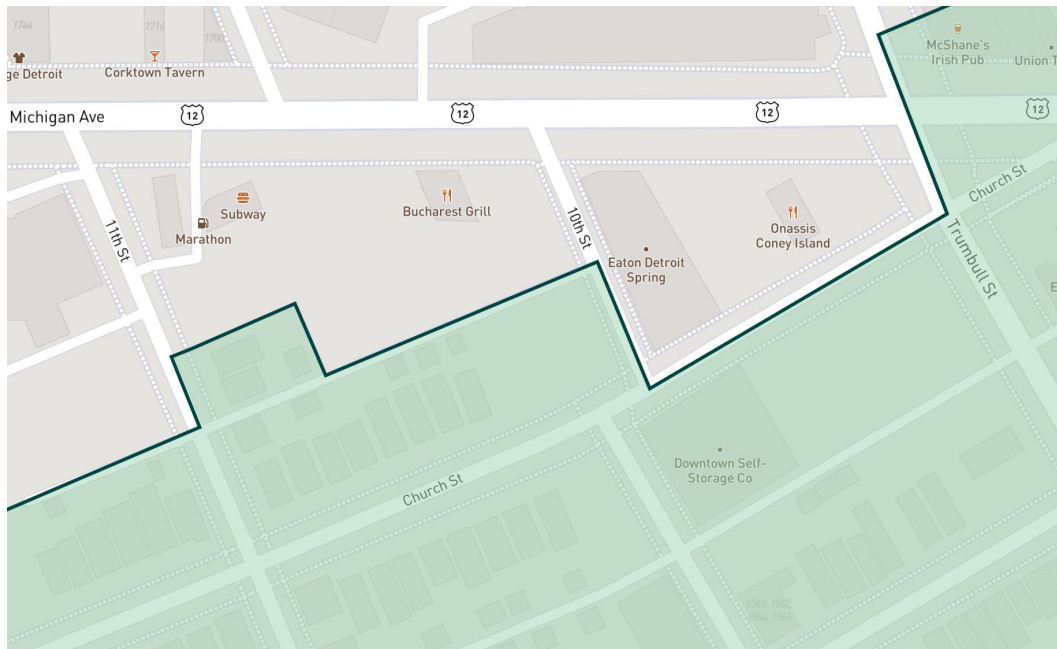
PROPOSED SCOPE: DEMOLISH BUILDING; ERECT NEW BUILDINGS AND PARKING STRUCTURE (ADVISORY OPINION PER SECTION 21-2-5)



General view of proposed development area, looking southeast across 1606-1622 Church vacant lots toward 1551 Church (Downtown Self-Storage Building) at center. Staff photo, February 26, 2021.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The proposed physical development project will be erected on ten parcels generally arranged in and around Church and Tenth Streets, in the Corktown Historic District. In addition, a parcel immediately adjacent to the District, 1611 Michigan, will be redeveloped. Current conditions at the proposed development parcels vary and are described below.



Extents of the Corktown Historic District, shown in green. The Michigan Avenue parcels are adjacent to the district and subject to advisory review only.

1501, 1525, 1533, 1537, 1541, and 1567 Church

These parcels are in the historic district, and form the entire northern half of a city block bound by Church Street at the north, 10th to the west, Trumbull to the east, and the east-west alley between 10th and Trumbull to the south. The parcels towards the east (1501-1541 Church) are paved. 1567 Church, at the west end of the block at 10th, is a roughly 130' square parcel fully occupied by a two-story brick warehouse/storage building.



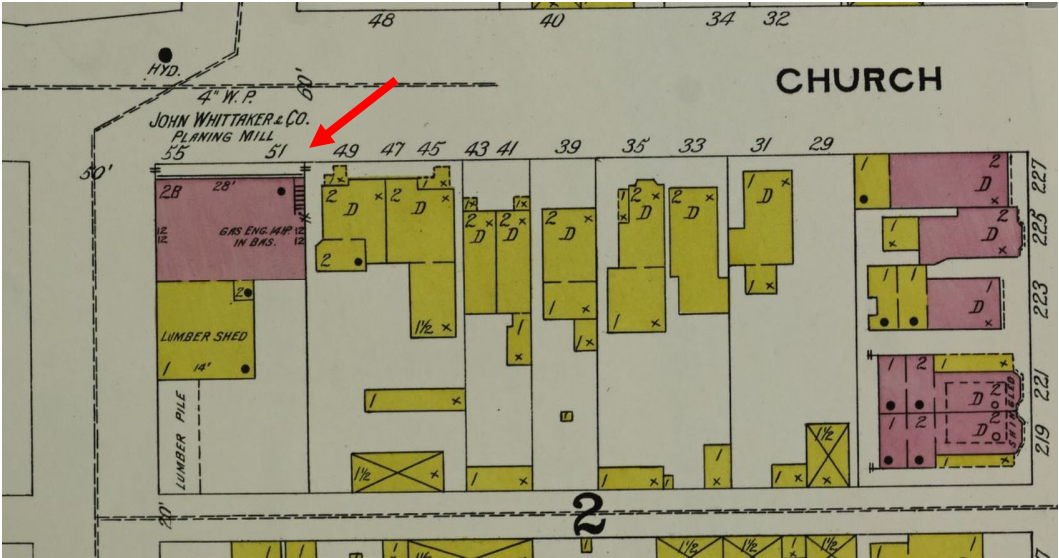
Historic district parcels outlined in red.

The building on the parcel at 1567 Church (addressed as 1551 Church) was erected circa 1894 and is today

referred to as the Downtown Self-Storage Building. For many years, this was the John Whittaker Planing Mill, a sawmill associated with the many nearby lumberyards in Corktown. Later, after expansion in 1916, it was the Red Arrow soda factory.

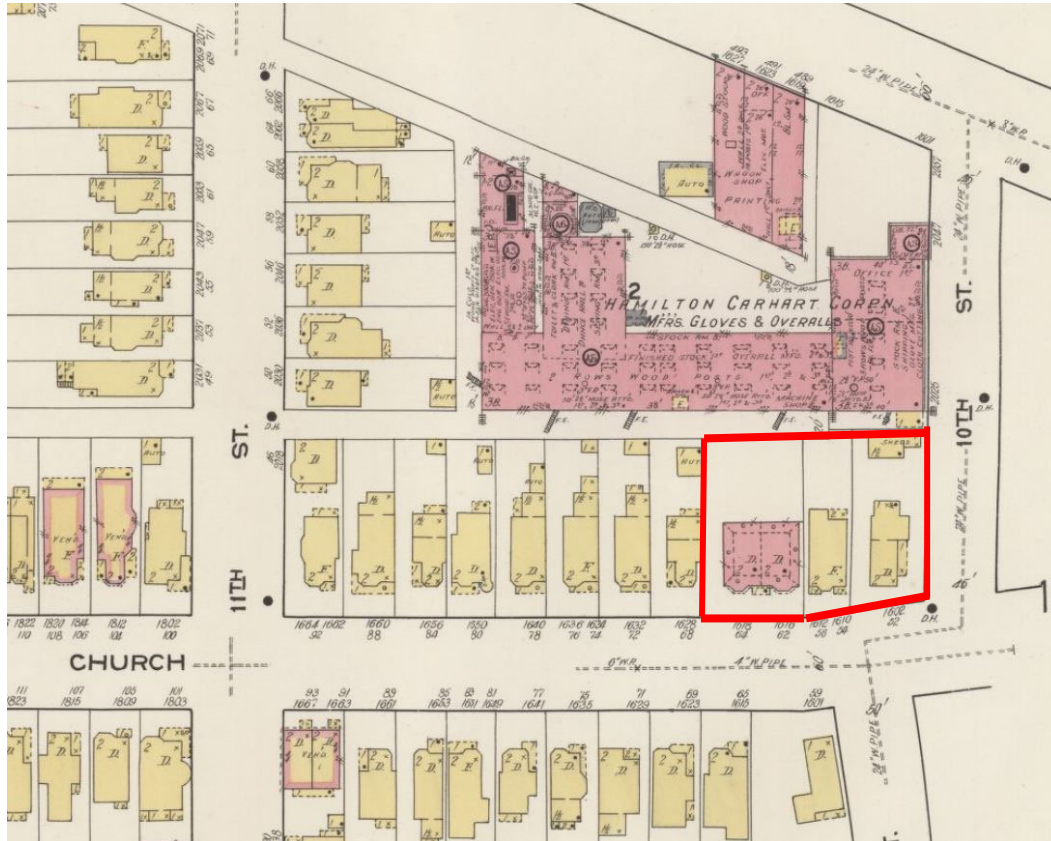


The building grew from a smaller mill core that was originally constructed at the corner of Church and 10th Streets, as shown below on an 1897 Sanborn map. This historic core still exists and is readable from the exterior. The building, in its current form, exhibits a high degree of historic integrity, including character-defining brickwork and opening patterns. It is considered a contributing structure to the historic district.



1606, 1610, 1614, and 1622 Church

These four parcels are also in the historic district, and are each approximately 33' wide by 115-120' in depth. They are mowed vacant lots at the eastern end of the otherwise dense block bound by Church Street at the south, 11th Street to the west, 10th Street to the east, and the east-west alley between 10th and 11th Streets to the north. The remainder of the block has historic age dwellings which are contributing structures to the historic district. Historic staff is not clear as to when the buildings on the parcels were demolished.



1611 Michigan

This parcel is immediately adjacent to (i.e., outside of) the Corktown Historic District. Currently it is a wide expanse of pavement and gravel serving as parking and/or storage, and once held an early Carhartt factory. Together with 1623 and 1645 Michigan, this parcel will be redeveloped for a proposed apartment building. The Commission will not have permit review responsibility for these parcels.





View of the Downtown Self-Storage Company Building, looking north from 10th. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



View of the Downtown Self-Storage Company Building, looking southeast at corner. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



Detail view of brickwork at alley. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



Detail view of parapet at "original" core of the building at Church and 10th. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



View of the vacant paved lots east of building, looking east towards Trumbull. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



Reverse view back towards west, along historic building and with 1606-1622 Church vacant lots visible in Middle distance. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



View towards the west at Church street vacant lots. Staff photo, February 26, 2021



View of the Michigan Avenue parcels, looking north. Staff photo, February 26, 2021

PROPOSAL

Because the proposed project is subject to the discretionary use of city (or agency/authority) assistance and/or incentives, at this time the Commission is acting only per Section 21-2-5 of the 2019 Detroit City Code to provide an advisory opinion concerning the potential “demonstrable effect” on the Corktown Historic District, which opinion will be forwarded to the Mayor and City Council for their consideration in their own review/approval of such discretionary city actions. No permit application (i.e., Certificate of Appropriateness) is under consideration at this time. Should a permit application for additions, demolition, or new construction for in-district properties be received and docketed, such application will be scheduled, advertised, heard, and considered at a future Commission meeting as a public hearing, per Sections 21-2-73, 21-2-75, 21-2-77, and 21-2-78 of the 2019 Detroit City Code. Only at that time would a final action occur. Decision or opinions entered today by the Commission do not bind the Commission in their later consideration of a permit application.

The proposed development project includes the following, as conceptually illustrated in the applicant’s submission materials:

1501, 1525, 1533, 1537, 1541, and 1567 Church

- The existing building (Downtown Self-Storage Company Building) is to be demolished.
- A 3-story, 35’ high parking structure, including 3000 SF of retail and 400 parking spaces, will be constructed on the site per the attached submission diagrams and renderings

1606, 1610, 1614, and 1622 Church

- Seven attached townhouse dwellings will be erected, each three stories (35’) in height, with 17 parking spaces at the rear

1611 Michigan (outside of historic district)

- A 7-story (82’-6”) apartment building with 188 units and 29 parking spaces to be erected, including 9,385 SF of retail space

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Corktown Historic District was established in 1984
- It is HDC staff opinion that the Downtown Storage Company Building, formerly the Whittaker sawmill, is a contributing resource to the district.
- The proposed apartment building, outside of the district and along Michigan Avenue, appears conceptually compatible with its context and the adjacent district, and does not endanger any historic materials or resources
- The proposed townhouses, in their conceptual form, appear likely to integrate into the historic district in their residential context, and do not endanger any historic materials or resources
- The proposed parking structure, although an urbanistically welcome improvement over surface parking, does not appear historically compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and the Elements of Design of the district, and endangers a historic resource, but may find favor with the Commission as part of an approval for inappropriate work (e.g., a Notice to Proceed). Per Element #22, ***General environmental character:***

The Corktown Historic District, with its narrow lots, shallow front yards, and small-scaled buildings, has a low-density, urban, mixed use character of a pre-automobile city. Its original cohesiveness has been eroded by housing demolition over the years. Anchored by the site of the former Tiger Stadium on the north, Michigan Central Station and Roosevelt Park on the west, Most Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church and the John C. Lodge Freeway on the east, and the West Side Industrial Park on the south, the neighborhood is set apart from its surrounding environment, resulting in a definable community in the shadows of Downtown Detroit.

ISSUES/COMMISSION ACTION

- The Commission is asked to provide comment under Section 21-2-5 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, as outlined below.

Section 21-2-5, Effects of projects on districts

The Commission is requested to make a finding concerning the “demonstrable effects of the proposed project and report same to the Mayor and City Council.” The intent of this section is to provide guidance to city government prior to committing to a particular course of action, under the following requirement:

A City-financed, licensed, permitted, authorized or contracted physical development project shall be considered to have a demonstrable effect on a designated or proposed historic district when any condition of the project creates a change, beneficial or adverse, in the quality of the historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, social or cultural significance that qualified the property for designation as an historic district or that may qualify the property for designation as an historic district. Generally, adverse effects occur under conditions which include:

- (1) Destruction or alteration of all or part of a resource;*
- (2) Isolation from or alteration of the surrounding environment of a resource;*
- (3) Introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the resource and its setting;*
- (4) Transfer or sale of a City-owned resource without adequate conditions or restrictions regarding preservation, maintenance, or use; and*
- (5) Neglect of a resource resulting in its deterioration or destruction.*