

STAFF REPORT: SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 MEETING

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

APPLICATION NUMBER: #21-7466

ADDRESS: 13200 DEXTER AVENUE

HISTORIC DISTRICT: RUSSELL WOODS-SULLIVAN

APPLICANT: KIMBERLY DOKES (ARCHITECT)

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 8/11/2021

DATE OF STAFF VISIT: 9/3/2021

SCOPE OF WORK: ESTABLISH A NEW RETAIL/COMMUNITY SPACE TO INCLUDE FIVE CONTAINER BUILDINGS, ARTWORK, AND A STAGE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject parcel is located in the Russell Woods-Sullivan Historic District, at the northeast corner of the intersection of Dexter Avenue and Tyler Street. Currently, 13200 Dexter Avenue is a vacant parcel which sits within a largely commercial setting. Specifically, ca. 1940s, one-story, flat-roof masonry commercial buildings are located directly to the north and west of the subject parcel. These buildings generally sit at a zero lot line/are located adjacent to the sidewalk. The parcel is currently owned by the City of Detroit.



13200 Dexter, current conditions

PROPOSAL

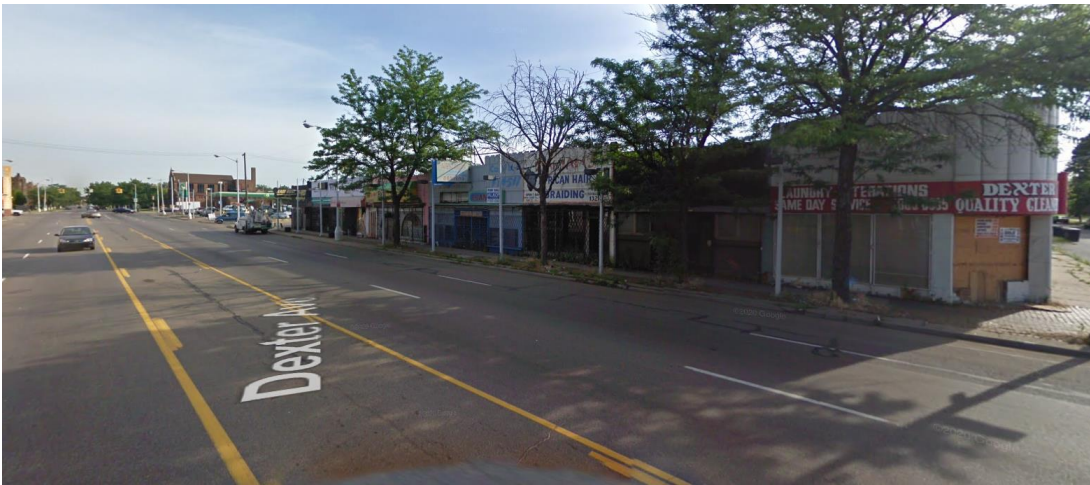
With the current submission, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to establish a new retail/community space within the subject parcel. See the submitted renderings, which provide details around the proposed new development. Specifically, the proposed project shall consist of the following elements:

- **Five new 40'x8'x8' steel shipping containers**
 - One container will serve as a restroom. This container will be centrally-located within the development
 - Three containers will be located at grade and shall house commercial uses. These containers will sit at the at the western and southern edges of the site and shall face upon Dexter Avenue and Tyler Street. Each container's interior space will be accessed via aluminum storefront doors. An aluminum walk-up window will also be installed at each of the two containers at the southwest corner of the parcel.
 - One container will installed atop the two the two containers at the southwest corner of the parcel. This container will serve to support rotating artwork displays
 - The exterior "walls" of the container are ribbed steel and will be painted either yellow or grey as per the submission
- **Art**
 - New artwork will be installed at the container structure which is located at the southwest corner of the site
- **Landscape/Hardscape**
 - The site shall include a concrete apron along Dexter Avenue and Tyler Street, directly adjacent to the sidewalk, grass at the interior event space, plantings (species not specified) at the southeast edge of the site, and gravel at the parking/food truck area
- **Performance stage**
 - A stepped, approximately 12'x12'x24" stage shall be located centrally within the site. It will be constructed of 2'x4' lumber and shall be unfinished/unpainted

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The proposed new installation will be funded solely by the City of Detroit
- The proposed development is "temporary" and shall remain within the site for four years per the applicant and property owner
- Per the submitted narrative, the intent of the installation is to "...invigorate retail along Dexter and help spur future development on the vacant city-owned site where it will be located...provide a retail hub for the now very vacant Dexter corridor and to encourage local entrepreneurship, create a social community hub, and host cultural events for the community." The installation will provide space for "...a broad range of diverse pop-up retailers, arts ventures, business enterprises, entrepreneurs, gallerists, and other vendors as part of a dynamic neighborhood retail activation strategy. Temporary tenants would ideally include commercial retailers, start-ups, entrepreneurs, and arts/culture-related businesses that will provide the highest quality and innovative approaches to activating spaces in the neighborhood."

- Please see the attached Citizen’s Guide, which outlines the community engagement which was held around the development of the project concept and design
- See the below Google Streetview images and Sanborn Map. The buildings which formerly existed within the project area were one-story, masonry, commercial structures which were erected ca. 1945-1960. The buildings were demolished in stages between 2013 and 2017.
- Brick pavers currently exist within the berm area/public right-of-way between the sidewalk. The project graphics indicate that the brick in the berm will be replaced with concrete
- Within the section of the application deck entitled “Community Engagement Narrative” the applicant notes that the community made comments towards “...incorporating ‘greening’ features into the design that speaks to the historic nature of the community and ‘softening’ the industrial character of the shipping containers.” Although the conceptual 3D renderings indicate that potted planting will be installed throughout the site, the actual site plan and narrative scope do not indicate that the project includes this landscape feature.
- The species of the four new plantings proposed for installation at the south eastern edge of the site have not been specified.



Project area, 2009 Google Streetview



Sanborn Insurance Map 1971, east side of 13200 block Dexter Boulevard

ISSUES

- Brick currently exist within the berm area/public right-of-way between the sidewalk. The project graphics indicate that the brick in the berm will be replaced with concrete. This condition exists in the 12800 block through the 13300 block of Dexter Avenue, on both sides of the street. It is staff's opinion that the proposed introduction of new concrete to replace the existing brick in the berm as well as the lack of new landscaping, will give the proposed installation an industrial character.
- The shipping containers proposed for installation are of an industrial nature and do not present an expression that is consistent with the existing/remaining adjacent architecture in scale, materiality, form, and set back. It is staff's opinion that that the development does not meet the conform to the district's Elements of Design nor does it meet the SOI Standard #2, which states the following:
 - *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*
- However, staff does recommend that the Commission consider the allowance of the project via the issuance of a Notice to Proceed, under the following prong as the project does appear to have strong community support:
 - (4) *Retention of the resource would not be in the interest of the majority of the community.*
- The project will not set a precedent as all cases should be reviewed on their own merits/on a case-by-case basis.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-73. Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)

Staff recommends that the Commission deny the issuance Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed project because it does not conform to the district's Elements of Design and meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation. In particular, Standard # 2, *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*

Section Sec. 21-2-75. Issuance of Notice to Proceed (NTP)

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a NTP for the project as proposed because the following condition prevails:

- (4) *Retention of the resource would not be in the interest of the majority of the community.*

However, staff recommends that this NTP be issued with the following conditions:

- The existing brick within the berm area shall be retained
- The applicant shall indicate the species of the four plantings proposed for installation at the site's southeast edge to HDC staff. Staff shall be afforded the opportunity to review and approve this element. If staff determines that the proposed plantings are not appropriate, they shall forward the work item to the Commission for review at a future meeting.
- Any new landscaping shall be reviewed and approved by HDC staff prior to issuance of the project's permit. If staff determines that the proposed plantings are not appropriate, they shall forward the work item to the Commission for review at a future meeting.
- The installation remain in-situ, as approved by the Commission, for up to four (4) calendar years from the date of the issuance of the project permit, as noted in the current application.