

STAFF REPORT 10-13-2021 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 21-7524

ADDRESS: 8029 COE, 1500-1532 VAN DYKE

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE HD

APPLICANT: CLIFFORD A. BROWN/COE VAN DYKE 2, LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 09-14-2021

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 10-01-2021

SCOPE: ERECTION OF 4-STORY MULTI-FAMILY/TOWN-HOME BUILDING DEVELOPMENT REQUIRING DEMOLITION OF TWO HOUSES

EXISTING CONDITIONS & PROPERTY HISTORY

The subject parcel is composed of six (6) separate parcels currently under various ownership, including the Detroit Land Bank and the developer. The development will occupy an area bound by Coe Street to the south, Van Dyke to the west, the southern boundary of 1536 Van Dyke/8020 St. Paul to the north, and the alley running north-south between Van Dyke and Parker Street to the east. Four of the parcels are vacant, two parcels (1514 and 1532 Van Dyke) are occupied by modest frame dwellings, which are contributing historic structures for the district.



View of existing conditions at the northeast corner of Van Dyke and Coe, view to the northeast along Van Dyke. Staff photo, October 1, 2021.

The 1983 designation report prepared by the Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB) notes that West Village received its name in the mid-20th century because of its location west of Indian Village. The report continues:

West Village not only has different physical characteristics than Indian Village in that it is more densely built-up and the lots are smaller, but, unlike its neighbor, it has always sheltered a variety of social

classes ranging from factory workers and artisans to millionaires... West Village contains a great variety of dwelling types representing the full range of housing concepts popular in the period from 1850 to 1930. The neighborhood has always sheltered a mixture of income groups with the result that there are modest frame workers' cottages, two-family houses, commodious middle-class single-family dwellings, spacious upper-class mansions, terrace houses, and various types of apartment buildings.

The subject parcel is on one of the first three blocks platted in the initial development of the previous Van Dyke ribbon farm, and still reflects in physical form this first wave of 19th century development. The existing houses on this parcel are representative of the “modest Victorian cottages” prominently discussed in the district’s designation report.



Parcel view of vicinity, subject parcel outlined in red. Blue arrow shows location of photo from previous page.



3D aerial view of vicinity, dominated by the multi-story Parkstone, at center, and other mid-rise apartment buildings. Red arrow indicates project site. Note especially the typical West Village mix of older, small frame houses and large masonry apartment buildings, reflecting the suspension of neighborhood redevelopment during the Depression.

The lot at the corner of Coe and Van Dyke was already vacant at the establishment of the historic district in 1983. However, as recently as 2013, a row of four original nineteenth century homes survived intact at the subject development parcel, terminating with the 20th century duplex at the corner of St. Paul (1536 Van Dyke, not on the project parcel). In November 2013, a major fire at 1526 Van Dyke spread and damaged the adjacent 1518 Van Dyke to the south; both houses were demolished without HDC review in 2015, creating the vacant lot and streetscape gap that exists today. It is believed, but not confirmed, that the demolitions were performed per emergency order from BSEED, according to the authority granted to the Director of Buildings by Section 21-2-74 of the historic ordinance, exclusively for the “immediately necessary” protection of public health and safety.



Sanborn map view of vicinity, dated 1897. Project site is shown in outlined in red. 1514 Van Dyke (originally 316 Van Dyke) and 1532 Van Dyke (originally 324 Van Dyke) are shown to exist at this time, confirming that they are both nineteenth century structures.



View of burned houses (1518 and 1532 Van Dyke) formerly on the project site, November 2013. The parcels occupied by these homes now serve as vacant land between the still existing 1514 and 1532 Van Dyke. HDC Staff Photo.



Current front view of 1514 Van Dyke, looking east. Staff photo, October 1, 2021.

1514 Van Dyke

The southernmost of the pair of houses proposed to be demolished, this dwelling appears on the 1897 Sanborn

map, and is likely at least a decade older than that. Although it has suffered inappropriate applications of pale yellow aluminum siding, inappropriate replacement of doors, windows, and porch elements, and deferred maintenance, it is still recognizably a nineteenth century house associated with the earliest period of development in this district. It appears to be in fair to poor condition and is occupied.

1532 Van Dyke

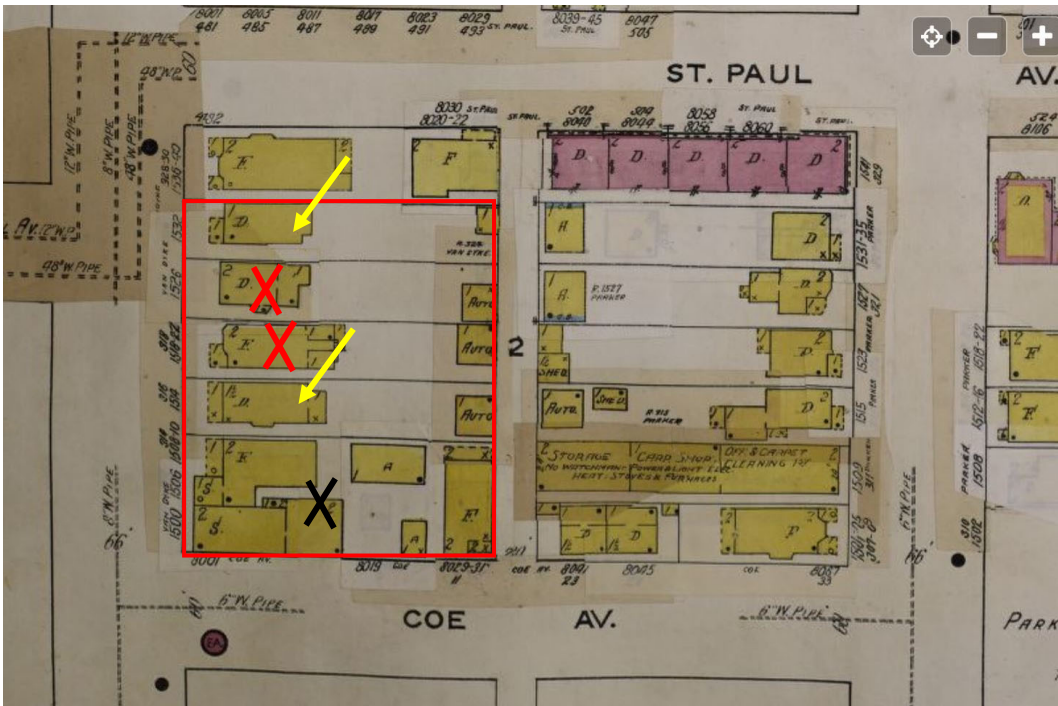
The northern of the pair of houses proposed to be demolished, this humble house also appears on the 1897 map. Although vacant, and some of its non-historic gray siding suffered scorching from the adjacent 2013 fire, the building appears to be in a salvageable condition typical of many vacant Detroit houses. Though the applicant's structural report contends that the house is 20th century and may be a "kit" house, neither of these are true. The house has some unusual and distinct features, including horizontally divided wooden sash, an interesting early modern detail not found elsewhere in the district; perhaps a creative flourish incorporated by the original builder. This house has no basement. Though it has also suffered loss of some porch elements, it retains window entablatures, evidence of a projecting bargeboard detail hidden behind the gable siding, and apparently salvageable wood clapboard as well; as such, in staff's opinion, this house has a higher historic integrity than 1514, is likelier easier to move, and should be assessed to be in fair to poor condition. Removal of the incompatible gray siding, repainting of the original wood finishes, and installation of a period correct set of porch columns would yield a remarkably attractive nineteenth-century frame cottage, as distinctive as any other house in West Village. Although a for sale sign has been in front of it for an extended period of time, the house has been subject to this development agreement for a few years and it has not clear if the Land Bank has been entertaining any offers on it.



Front view of 1532 Van Dyke, looking east. Staff photo, October 1, 2021.



Side view (south elevation) of 1532 Van Dyke, looking north. Note original wood windows of eccentric design.



Sanborn map view of vicinity, circa 1951. Project site is shown in outlined in red. Parcels with an "X" are now vacant lots, though some have trees which contribute to tree canopy. The red "X"s indicate two buildings which burned in 2013. Yellow arrows are currently extant 1514 and 1532 Van Dyke, both of them wood-framed single-family dwellings.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicant proposes to demolish two existing buildings on the site, 1514 Van Dyke and 1532 Van Dyke, and erect a four-story, multi-family/town-home mixed use building and associated surface parking lot per the attached drawings, documents, and specifications. The new building will extend to the front lot line along both Van Dyke and Coe, and exhibit a combination of stained cedar siding, dark brick masonry, metal panel, expanses of glass, and commercial grade “dark bronze” vinyl windows. The parking lot will be accessed from the alley, and includes 45 spaces. The building will provide 53 mixed-income units, five (5) for-sale townhomes with two-car garages, and 1400 SF of retail at the corner.



Rendering of the proposed building, Van Dyke Elevation, from the applicant’s submission materials. Looking towards the south.



1 VAN DYKE ELEVATION



2 COE AVE ELEVATION

Proposed elevations as depicted in the submitted materials.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The West Village Historic District was established in 1983. Development along Van Dyke began in 1876.
- Though the applicant, in his application materials, recognizes the unlikelihood of a Certificate of Appropriateness and pursues a Notice to Proceed for this project, the Commission considers all applications for a Certificate of Appropriateness first. The points below explore this possibility.
- The existing homes at 1514 and 1532 Van Dyke, discussed individually below, date to the neighborhood's earliest development period and are clearly the first buildings erected on this land. It is staff's opinion that while their current appearance may be shabby and/or abandoned, each of the buildings do maintain *integrity* under National Park Service definitions applicable to historic districts, and the two buildings are thus *contributing resources* to this district. *Integrity* is defined as "the ability of a property to convey its historical associations or attributes," and is divided into seven aspects. These aspects are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, all of which are defined by statute, guidelines, and professional practice.
- The developer, in the development agreement with the Land Bank, agreed to move the historic structures prior to the development of the site. Typically, and under a strict reading of the NPS guidelines, moving of buildings has the potential to destroy *integrity of setting* and thus remove the resource from contributing status or historic eligibility. However, HDC staff was comfortable at that time (early 2019) in giving a conceptual green-light to a potential move, dependent of course on HDC approval, for several reasons:
 - The West Village has a history of moved houses, including at least one (i.e., 7930 Agnes) since it has become a historic district, suggesting that moving these smaller frame houses around in the same historic context may not completely disrupt their integrity of setting, and may indeed strengthen the historic character and viability of the overall district
 - There are many vacant lots in the neighborhood where similar nineteenth century homes once stood and have long since disappeared. Rebuilding the streetscape with historic houses "native" to the neighborhood would be preferable to losing even more houses
 - It is known to historic staff that dozens, if not hundreds, of smaller houses were moved in Detroit during the freeway construction campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, as their owners sought to preserve them in new settings. Although documentation is still evolving, and no historic context has been prepared around this theme, staff feels it is likely that such activity could have historic resonance and thematic importance in and of itself, ultimately extending toward a reasonable interpretation of integrity for historic settings in Detroit, given that many houses may not be in their original locations
 - HDC staff, who are also of course planning staff, did agree that additional density and housing on Van Dyke is desirable and appropriate for this corridor, and that transforming the current (mostly) vacant condition of this block is a major opportunity that would merit any loss of integrity incurred by moving these contributing buildings
- However, although HDC staff was prepared to recommend a COA for the moving of the houses, and has always supported conceptual development of a dense, modern, mixed-use building on the site, the proposal to instead demolish these houses removes that recommendation from the table. The developer has claimed in his application materials that the move alone for both houses would cost approximately \$450,000, not including the costs to perform a full rehabilitation. A "move budget" is included in the applicant's submitted materials.
- Though these are both very modest, humble, unpretentious and minimally adorned structures, historic preservation is not only about preserving "glorious," beautiful, or resplendent places. Historic preservation is about preserving history, (i.e., physical fabric), that is important in telling a significant story about a particular part of our built environment, according to the reasons that the district was deemed significant in the first place. These two structures do exactly that, as the significant history of this district extends from the first small working-class dwellings to the large luxury apartment buildings of the 1920s.

ISSUES – HISTORIC APPROPRIATENESS

- Demolition of a *contributing resource* in a historic district is adverse to the principles and public purpose of historic preservation, as enshrined in both federal/state law and local ordinance. As such, it is staff's recommendation that a proposal requiring the demolition of both houses should be considered inappropriate under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and thus ineligible for an approval via a Certificate of Appropriateness.
- Several mature trees, including a horse chestnut, a large Northern Catalpa at the alley, a gingko, a bald cypress, and in particular, a towering American elm at the northwest corner of the site, are additional historic resources (i.e., significant landscape features) endangered by the proposal. Van Dyke already has a weak tree canopy. None of these trees are indicated to remain, though unspecified new trees are indicated on the site plan.



View of American elm, looking towards the east, at the northwest corner of the proposed development site. Note scale of tree adjacent to the existing 2 ½ story high duplex, which is probably around 35 feet tall at the gable.

- Independent from the status of the existing historic buildings and trees on the site, historic staff offers an assessment of the proposed new building with respect to the West Village Historic District's Elements of Design, relevant portions of which are excerpted below:
 - **Element 1, Height:** *Buildings in West Village range in height from one story to 11 stories....Apartment buildings range from two stories to 11 stories tall although buildings of more than four stories are rare*
 - **Element 2, Proportion of buildings' front facades:** *Apartment buildings are taller than wide, terraces and attached row houses are wider than tall when taken as a whole*
 - **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:** *Areas of voids generally constitute between 15 percent and 30 percent of the front facades. Most major openings are taller than*

- wide, although when grouped together some may achieve a horizontal effect. The district contains a great variety of sizes, shapes, and arrangements of openings
- **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:** Voids are usually spaced evenly within the facades, resulting in balanced compositions. Buildings influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and the Victorian Era display voids arranged with more freedom.
 - **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets:** Spacing of buildings on streets is generally determined by the setback from the side lot line, which tends to vary according to the width of the lot. The regularity of spacing on narrow lots or parcels is interrupted by vacant lots resulting from demolition as well as the occasional combination of several lots for larger, newer structures.
 - **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections:** Most residences have porch projections and/or entrance recessions...Rowhouses or terraces generally exhibit freedom in placement of porches and entrances within each complex
 - **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** The majority of the buildings in West Village have either common or pressed brick or clapboard sheathing as their principal exterior material...Most buildings have wood trim
 - **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** The most common relationship of textures are the low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted to smooth wood trim and/or wood clapboard contrasted with smoother trim... The smoother surface of glazed brick or painted brick is sometimes contrasted with stone or wood trim.
 - **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** Orange natural brick, pressed brick, and replacement siding in natural earth colors are plentiful in the district...
 - **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** Architectural details generally relate to style...In general, various styles are rich in architectural detail.
 - **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** The district is characterized by a diversity of roof shapes...roofs of commercial buildings generally appear flat.
 - **Element 12, Walls of continuity:** The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings, with their generally uniform setbacks within block faces. New buildings should conform to these setbacks where they exist...
 - **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** Some large American elm trees remain on the tree lawns in the district, although they are virtually extinct.
 - **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures:** In those areas of the district where demolition of houses has occurred, the character of the open space is haphazard as it relates to the buildings
 - **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** There is a variety of scale from block to block depending on lot width and style...Façade elements have been determined by what is appropriate for the style.
 - **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevations:** The expression of direction on residential blocks is neutral...rowhouses and terraces are horizontal in directional expression; apartment buildings are vertical.
 - **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** Setbacks on the north-south streets in the district vary slightly from area to area within the district, although they are generally consistent within each street face and/or subdivision...The varying designs of the buildings, frequently with slight setbacks or projections in their facades, cause the buildings to relate to the front setback line in different ways; this creates a slight variation in the setback line.
 - **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** Lot coverages range from 15 percent to 80 percent. Apartment buildings and rowhouses generally occupy a percentage at the high end of this range....
 - **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** The degree of complexity has been determined by what is typical and appropriate for a given style...
 - **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** Most of the buildings are oriented toward the

- street...Rowhouses and terraces are usually oriented towards the east-west streets.*
- **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** *...Other styles are asymmetrical but most often result in balanced compositions.*
 - **Element 22, General environmental character:** *The West Village District is characterized by residential and minor commercial development dating from 1880 through 1930. Long straight streets, a significant array of housing types, and a cohesiveness achieved through uniform setbacks and heights results in an urban, medium density neighborhood. West Village is of an urban character, rare in the City, because of the diversity of building types in the area.*
- Reviewing the Elements of Design excerpted above, staff finds that the proposed new construction, executed in a contemporary modern style appropriate to our own era, is aligned with the Elements in many ways, including height, proportion, rhythm, relationship of materials/textures/colors, architectural details, walls of continuity, roof shapes and degree of complexity within the facade. Less aligned are the proposed setbacks (or lack thereof), and preservation of significant landscape features. Overall, staff assesses that the building “conforms” to the Elements of Design per the ordinance.
 - Historic staff would support a Certificate of Appropriateness for the new construction contingent upon preservation and relocation of the historic houses, and preservation of the elm tree at the northwest corner, which would necessitate a building setback at that location.
 - This concludes analysis of historic appropriateness for a COA. An analysis for a Notice to Proceed approval follows on the next page.

NOTICE-TO-PROCEED DISCUSSION

- Per the state’s local historic districts act and the city’s corresponding local ordinance, specifically Section 21-2-75 of the 2019 Detroit City Code, applications for *inappropriate* work in historic districts may occasionally be approved by the Commission via issuance of a Notice to Proceed when certain conditions prevail, summarized in the following four “prongs”:
 1. *The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or occupants*
 2. *The resource is a deterrent to a major improvement program that will be of substantial benefit to the community*
 3. *Retention of the resource would cause undue financial hardship to the owner*
 4. *Retention of the resource would not be in the interest of the majority of the community*
- As discussed above, because of the loss of contributing resources (houses/trees) foreclosing the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, staff does find that a Notice to Proceed would be necessary for the project to be approved. As is typical in considerations under the Notice to Proceed authority, especially under prongs 2 and 4, the professional opinion and advice of the Planning Department may become more central to the Commission’s decision.
- The Planning and Development Department strongly supports the general concept of the project, including the demolition of the two marginally contributing houses. The project brings needed density to a prominent corner location in a strategic neighborhood, appears to have community support, will provide permanent and temporary jobs, additional municipal tax revenue, and addresses a substantial need for affordable housing in Detroit. The building is conceptually well-designed with sensitive yet modern materials, and will increase the walkability, economic activity, and the overall viability of the area.
- However, the Planning Department does note some unaddressed concerns with the fully-developed design for the new building, concerns that have previously been conveyed to the applicant team and have not yet been acted upon, including but not limited to:
 1. The lack of a front (Van Dyke elevation) setback aligning the building to the historic north-south setback line established by neighboring properties, especially 1536 Van Dyke (the duplex at the northern end of the subject block)
 2. The lack of a north side setback, or reduction in massing, towards the north, introducing light and distance between the development and 1536 Van Dyke, and showing deference to the historic context
- Partial comments and recommendations from PDD’s Design Review team are reproduced on the following two pages. The full comments are available appended to the staff report on the website.

ADVISORY REVIEW

- Per Section 21-2-5 of the city code, the Commission is also required to make a finding on the demonstrable effect of the proposed physical development project, and if an effect is found, whether that effect is likely to be beneficial or adverse to the historic district. This finding does not affect the permit approval decision (i.e, COA/NTP), and will be reported separately to the Mayor and City Council.

THIS IS INTENSE. THE BUILDINGS FRONT SETBACK AS WELL AS THE HEIGHT AT THIS END SHOULD LINE UP WITH THE EXISTING HOME.

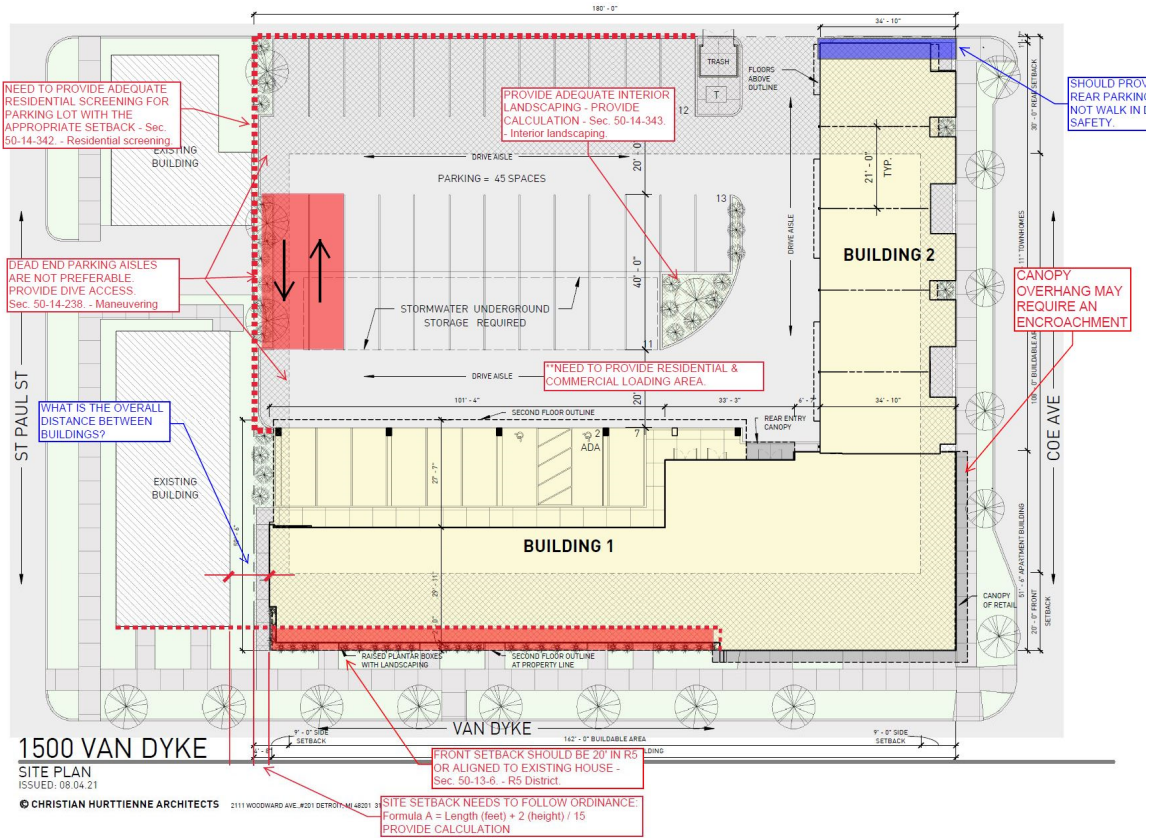


1500 VAN DYKE

EXTERIOR RENDERINGS

ISSUED: 08.04.21

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1 VAN DYKE ELEVATION

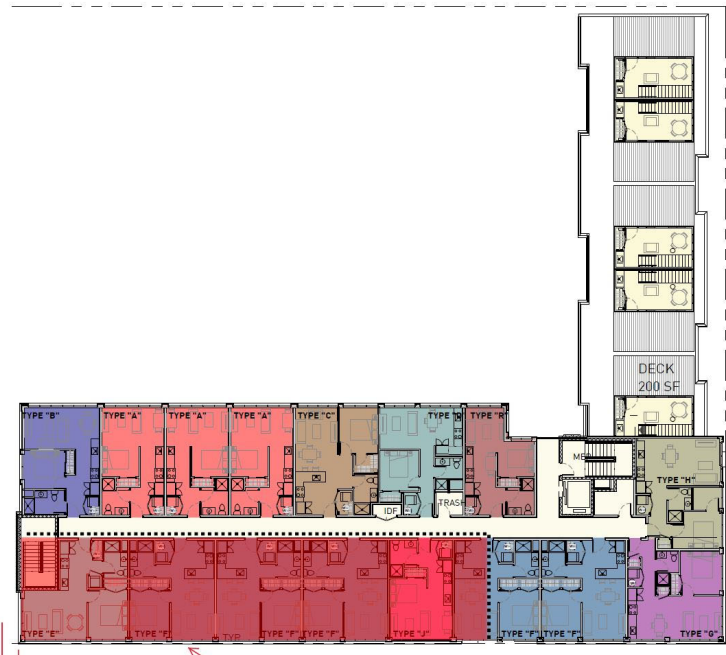
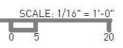


2 COE AVE ELEVATION

1500 VAN DYKE

EXTERIOR ELEVATIONS
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1500 VAN DYKE

FLOOR PLAN - LEVEL 04
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THE ELEVATION ALONG VAN DYKE NEEDS TO STEP DOWN TO MATCH THE HEIGHT OF THE ADJACENT EXISTING HOUSE.

SITE SETBACK NEEDS TO FOLLOW ORDINANCE: Formula A = Length (feet) + 2 (height) / 15. PROVIDE CALCULATION.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

Staff finds that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the defined elements of design for the historic district, but without substantial detriment to the public welfare and without substantial derogation from the intents and purposes of the city's historic ordinance. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Notice to Proceed for the proposed work, contingent upon satisfaction of the conditions identified in prong 2 of 21-2-78, as such:

The resource is a deterrent to a major improvement program that will be of substantial benefit to the community. Substantial benefit shall be found only if the applicant proposing the work has obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing and environmental clearances, and the improvement program is otherwise feasible.

And the additional condition that the NTP be suspended, and not issued, until the proposal is modified to incorporate recommendations of the planning department; satisfaction thereof to be confirmed to HDC staff by the final approval of the Planning Director, or his/her deputy. HDC staff is empowered to approve changes that satisfy the planning department and are generally aligned with Commission discussion and intent.