

**STAFF REPORT 03-16-2022 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: 21-7696**

**ADDRESS: 1705 SIXTH**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN**

**APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: MICHAEL SKLENKA, SUBJECT STUDIO**

**OWNER OF RECORD: CARY L. BRAINARD**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 03-14-2022**

**SCOPE: ERECT ADDITION, REPLACE WINDOWS**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The project site is the John Mason House (c. 1853), one of Corktown's most important historic properties; in fact, it is listed first in the Historic Designation Advisory Board's designation report as an example of the architecture of Corktown. The HDAB report notes the house's long association with brewers, including its builder:

*John Mason, a prominent Detroit brewer, had his home built at 1705 Sixth and established the Mason Brewery just to its north on the corner of Michigan Avenue and Sixth Street. In 1862 Mason sold his brewery to Peter J. Bowker and his partner, Thomas S. Blackmur, manufacturers of ale, port, and beer. That same year, Bowker moved into the house... William C. Duncan, the third resident of the house... was also a brewer and the president of Duncan's Central Brewery.... Edward Johnson, Jr., another brewer, moved into 1705 Sixth in 1877.*

A rental property by the 1890s, the building was a funeral home at the time of district designation in the 1980s, and experienced a comprehensive rehabilitation for residential use in 1992, at which time the adjacent non-contributing garage was demolished, and the current windows were installed. The current expression of the property has been largely consistent since the early 1990s.



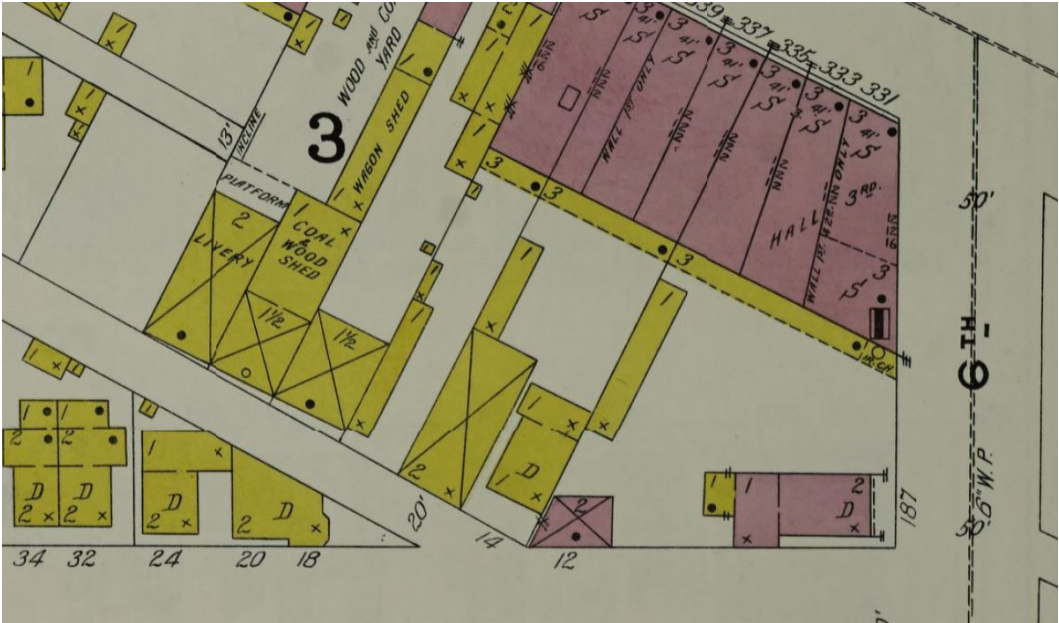
*View of existing conditions at 1705 Sixth, view towards the southwest, Staff photo, March 14, 2022.*

Historically, the John Mason House is not only an extraordinarily important building in the Corktown context, it is one of only a handful of Greek Revival townhouses (the 1984 designation report suggests one of five) that are extant in the entire city. The house is two stories in height, composed of structural red brick, with large, orderly

placed double-hung style windows at the front façade, a restrained Greek Revival entrance and stone ornamentation. The brick sides are gabled, with pronounced parapet walls and four chimneys. A later nineteenth century addition, also brick, extends to the west at the rear.



Subject parcel outlined in yellow, per Detroit Parcel Viewer. Note location at edge of historic district, adjacent to the Lodge Freeway and Michigan Avenue. Compare historic environs, below.



1897 Sanborn map of same vicinity, house at 1705 Sixth (originally 187 6<sup>th</sup>) indicated by arrow.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

Per the submitted drawings and narrative, the applicant is proposing to **erect an adjacent garage/ADU addition**, per the following points:

- Construct two-car garage with storage closets, enclosed mudroom with small rear porch, roof deck adjacent to and accessible from existing house, and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) with walk-up entrance off 6<sup>th</sup> Street.
- Install two (2) carriage style overhead garage doors at front façade, and one (1) steel and glass overhead garage door at rear façade.
- Construct brick parapet wall at side façade.
- Construct two peaked dormers at front façade roof
- Install one (1) fixed window at second level of side façade and one (1) casement window second level at rear façade.
- Install horizontal fiber-cement lap siding (smooth) with 4" exposure and trim boards at front and rear facades, dormers, and second level adjacent to roof deck
- Install standing-seam metal roof with aluminum gutters and downspouts in matching color over addition, dormers, and mudroom enclosure

Additionally, rehabilitation proposed for the **existing historic house** includes the following:

- Relocate HVAC exhaust penetrations from underneath existing masonry porch to rear side yard
- Relocate air condenser unit to rear side yard
- Replace all existing wood windows (non-historic with between-glass muntins) with new aluminum-clad, wood windows (Marvin Signature Ultimate Double Hung G2/divided lite configuration not specified; authentic divided lites (ADL), simulated divided lites (SDL), or simulated divided lites with spacer (SDLS) available per manufacturer) with brickmolding inset into masonry openings.
- Install aluminum-clad wood windows with brickmolding inset at grade-level basement masonry openings
- Remove window at second level side yard, relocate door and frame from kitchen into opening for new roof deck access
- Install new aluminum-clad wood window with brickmolding inset into masonry opening from relocated kitchen door. Infill base with brick and stone sill to match existing house

**Site alterations** include the following:

- Remove small trees and CMU planting bed at rear yard
- Remove multiple dead limbs from large tree in side yard
- Remove existing (non-historic) pergola in rear yard
- Relocate leg of fence along 6<sup>th</sup> Street to align with sidewalk
- Relocate (anachronistic/re-sited) historic light pole at sidewalk to rear yard.
- Remove existing masonry porch pad and wood stair at side yard

Renderings provided by the applicant in their submission materials are given below:



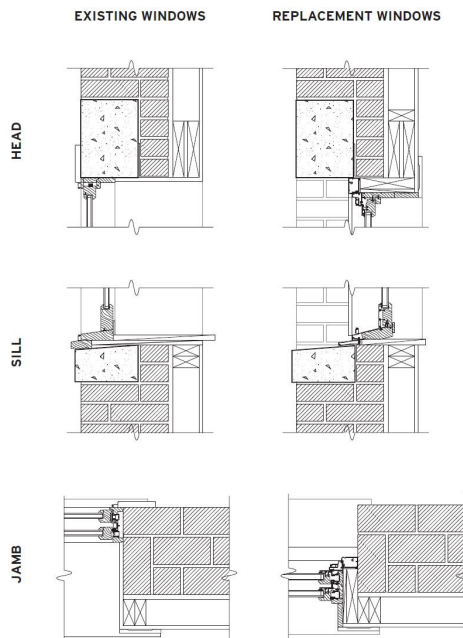
*Rendering of proposed garage/addition (right) on-site, view to southwest from street, from applicant's submission.*



*Rendering of proposed garage/addition, view from rear to southeast, from applicant's submission.*

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Corktown Historic District was established in 1984.
- Staff recommends that the Commission weigh additions to historic properties using the following guidelines, which are based on National Park Service guidance and precedent:
  - Should defer to, and not detract from, the historic building
  - Should feature materials and design vocabulary that complements the historic building
  - Should be clearly differentiated as an addition, typically via the use of contemporary design cues
- The proposed addition approximates the footprint of the previous non-contributing garage demolished in 1992. Materials are contemporary but used in ways that respect and respond to the historic context.
- The northern “bookend” wall, with its Flemish bond brick pattern, strongly vertical nature, and open screen element, is reminiscent of successful 20<sup>th</sup> century modern brick interventions in 18<sup>th</sup> century neighborhoods in historic east coast cities (e.g., Society Hill, Philadelphia, among others). The wall forms a convincing and satisfactory end piece to the linear expansion of the historic building.
- The proposed replacement of the windows will substantially improve the building’s appearance and enhance its historic character. The incorporation of simulated (or authentic) divided lites will reintroduce needed texture and detailing to the windows. Furthermore, and importantly, the proper recession of the windows within their rough openings (made apparent per applicant’s design details below) will mitigate the unacceptably flat expression of the current installation. Shadow-lines and heavily recessed windows are often distinctive character-defining features of historic facades. Replacing the windows in a different plane as proposed here will substantially improve the building’s expression.



- The windows throughout *both* the existing building and the addition are proposed to be dark bronze in color. The Commission’s color chart for Federal Revival houses ([color system C](#)) suggests that yellowish-white is the preferred trim color, and that windows should match the trim (window sash can also be black). The doorway trim in the application is proposed as white. Staff recommends that the windows on the historic building match the white of the door, which should be a classical (off-white) tone, not bright white. Along with being an appropriate color, white windows on the historic house will help the house assert itself with respect to the newer/subordinate addition and its richer/darker finish tones. A bold door color, already dark blue, is appropriate for the historic house. Staff finds that the proposed modifications to window/door openings at the north elevation are appropriate.
- The proposed siding for the addition is Hardie board cementitious siding. As part of a new building/distinct addition on a historic property, staff finds this product to be appropriate. The “deep

ocean” color is a bold choice, but in reviewing photos of other installations the color is not quite as vibrant as it might appear from the applicant renderings; it carries a tone of dark gray in it. See applicant photo on page HDC-24. Staff is satisfied with the color choice in this composition, particularly given the cumulative effect of the project as a whole, including the brick parapet wall, which (as discussed above) grounds the composition historically. Shades of blue have also been successfully used in other comparable historic districts.

- The lamppost in front of the property is said by the applicant to be relocated from Fort Wayne and installed at this spot in 1992. Staff can confirm only that the lamppost does not appear to be original to this property or anywhere in the vicinity. The chain of custody as related to Fort Wayne is unclear, but as pertains to this property the lamppost is merely a sculptural object and not related to this property’s historic integrity and setting (thus its relocation in the context of this project is not at issue).
- Staff finds that the proposed addition, while large, nevertheless meets the Standards and Guidelines relevant to additions, in that it is sensitively designed to be true to its own era while preserving the massing, expression, and distinctive historic materiality of the original building. The elements composing the addition, including pitched roofs, dormers, and brick walls designed in a contemporary manner, are respectful to their historic precedents without attempting to become facsimiles or create a false sense of historical development.

## ISSUES

- Staff recommends to the applicant that true or authentic divided lites (ADLs) be specified on the historic portion of the house, given the rarity and stature of the building among our city’s historic properties. However, simulated divided lights with spacers (SDLs) would not be inappropriate.
- It is staff’s opinion that the proposed new construction retains the historic character of the property and district, is aligned with the district’s Elements of Design, and protects and preserves the integrity of the property and the surrounding district. Staff recommendation is to approve. The addition of an accessory dwelling unit is not inconsistent with the former density of Corktown and will help strengthen the neighborhood’s historic walkability.

## RECOMMENDATION

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

The proposed addition, rehabilitation, and related sitework is compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of its environment, and does not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The design includes several features to add complexity and visual interest consistent with its historic context, and is compliant with the district’s Elements of Design.

Staff therefore recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Corktown Historic District’s Elements of Design, with the condition that, *on the historic building*:

- Window finish color be revised to match the door trim, both to be a yellowish-white (“classical white”) consistent with the recommendations made in Color System C and acceptable to staff
- Windows should incorporate authentic divided lites, or at least simulated divided lites with spacers.