

STAFF REPORT: 05-11-2022 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

ADDRESS: 1977 WOODBRIDGE (AKA 1977 EAST WOODBRIDGE)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: ADJACENT TO MCGREGOR CARRIAGE HOUSE HD

PROPERTY OWNER: DETROIT ECONOMIC GROWTH CORPORATION (DEGC)

SPONSORING CITY AGENCY/AUTHORITY: DEGC

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 05-06-2022

PROPOSED SCOPE: DEMOLISH FLANKING BUILDINGS, ERECT NEW ADDITIONS, GENERAL REHABILITATION (ADVISORY OPINION PER SECTION 21-2-5)

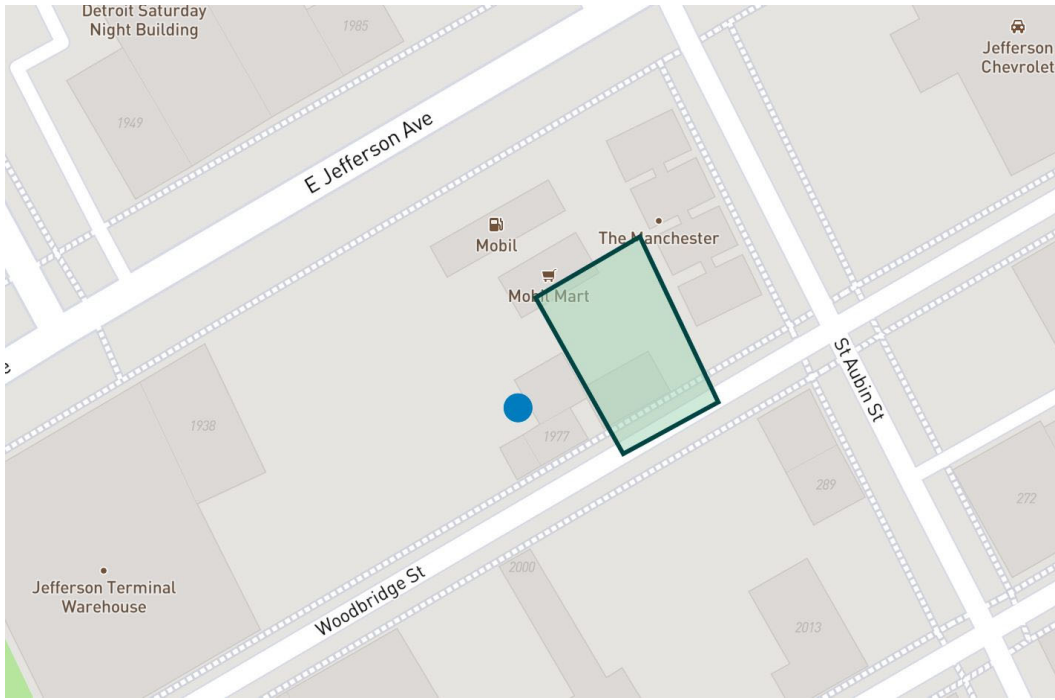


View of existing conditions at 1977 Woodbridge. Oldest portion at center (2 stories, unpainted brick). Flanking 1-story buildings are the painted brick additions at either side. Historic district building at far right of image (see photo on page 2). Staff photo, May 6, 2022.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

1977 Woodbridge is a nineteenth century, common brick carriage house that has outlived the Jefferson Avenue mansion it once served. It sits immediately adjacent to the larger and more ornamented McGregor Carriage House, another orphaned building that has also lost its original Jefferson-oriented mansion house. The McGregor Carriage House was designated as a single-building local historic district in 1983, shortly after an award-winning adaptive reuse was completed at that structure.

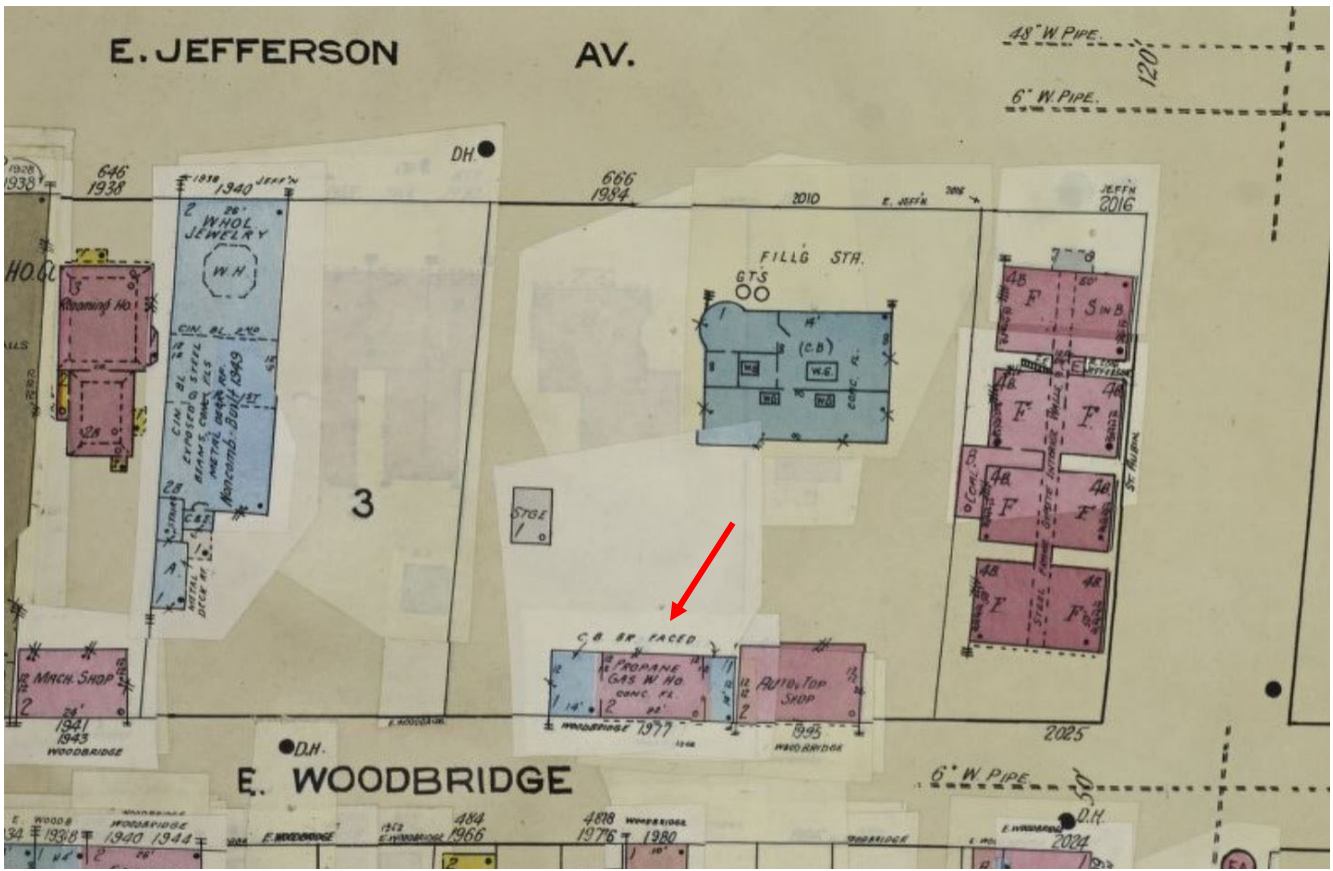
The subject non-designated building is two-stories of common structural brick, in a simple gable-end design with a front facing gable off-center to the main entrance below it. The original 2-story portion is flanked by two later 1-story concrete block and brick buildings, which appear to be early 20th century, and of utilitarian design. According to the HDAB report for the McGregor Carriage House, 1977 Woodbridge once hosted the Brauhaus Restaurant, long since gone. The building is missing a portion of its roof, and many windows and doors are missing or broken. Substantial exterior and interior rehabilitation work is urgently needed.



Extents of the McGregor Carriage House Historic District, shown in green. 1977 Woodbridge property, adjacent to the west, is shown with a blue dot.



View of the single building in the McGregor Carriage House Historic District, erected circa 1885. Staff photo, May 6, 2022.



A 1950 Sanborn map shows the two carriage houses (1977 Woodbridge identified with red arrow). Note the pasted corrections to the map showing the removal of the original mansions in favor of a “filling station.”



1977 Woodbridge shown with red arrow, adjacent to the McGregor Carriage House HD outlined in yellow.

PROPOSAL

1977 Woodbridge was subject to an RFP in 2019 to identify development teams qualified to return the building to service as a destination retail or commercial location. The DEGC has awarded the project to a developer who plans to rehabilitate the center (older) 2-story portion and create two new flanking additions to replace the existing ones. The property will become a cigar bar.



Proposed rendering of the Discretion Cigar Bar, per the submission materials. McGregor Carriage House HD at right.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- 1977 Woodbridge has been vacant and periodically open to trespass. This property's obviously distressed condition represents a threat to the economic and physical viability of the adjacent designated McGregor Carriage House Historic District at 1995 Woodbridge.
- Throughout 2019, historic preservation staff in the Planning and Development Department were invited by DEGC to sit on the RFP interview team, and participated in the process that led to the selection of the awarded development team.
- From the outset, the DEGC mandated the preservation of the older 2-story portion, leaving retention of the flanking buildings optional. Historic preservation staff concurred with this approach. The developer proposes to replace these buildings with new, similarly-scaled additions flanking the historic core. The western addition will additionally feature another gabled-end story. Finishes for the newly built portions will be contemporary.
- The current condition of 1977 Woodbridge's historic center core is poor, with substantial deterioration at the roof and throughout. Without immediate attention, the property could fall into ruin and face demolition. Such an outcome would potentially have a negative effect on the adjacent district. Overall, in staff's opinion, the proposed development project will accomplish a reasonably appropriate rehabilitation of the oldest portion of the property, with a modern expression replacing the older additions, and maintain important historic context and massing west of the designated property.
- As far as the effect on the McGregor Carriage House Historic District, the proposed alterations and renovations of 1977 Woodbridge would not appear to impact any distinctive character-defining features of that building, either positively or negatively; its proposed renovation would preserve important but unprotected historic context and likely improve the value of its designated neighbor, which may aid in its continued maintenance and preservation.

ISSUES

- Staff has no issues with the proposal and recommends that the Commission find the proposed project to have a demonstrable effect that is beneficial, as its successful completion would preserve undesignated and relevant historic context from potential loss.

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.*