

**STAFF REPORT:** 6/22/2022 SPECIAL MEETING

**PREPARED BY:** J. ROSS

**ADDRESS:** 445 W. FOREST

**APPLICATION NO:** #22-7844

**HISTORIC DISTRICT:** WARREN-PRENTIS

**APPLICANT:** SHANE OVERBY

**OWNER:** TOAD MANAGEMENT LLC

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT:** 5/27/2022

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION:** 5/20/2022

**SCOPE:** INSTALL FENCING AND PATIOS AT FRONT YARD

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The building located at 445 W. Forest was erected in 1892 and is known as the Williamson House. Architect Almon Clothier Varney designed the building, which was erected at a cost of \$8,000. Per the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board:

The impressive three-story brick residence is eclectic in style, but is predominantly Romanesque, with the stone foundation rising to the first floor at window-sill height. The intricate façade is essentially three bays wide and consists of a broad, flat wall of brick with a low-pitched gable. The east bay contains a three-story tower with a conical roof. The central entrance bay is flanked by a broad, two-story bay topped with a brick parapet railing. The side elevations lack architectural ornamentation due to the closeness of the buildings.

Windows at stories 1-3 are wood and are covered with storms. New fixed basement windows (materiality unknown) have recently been installed. Gravel is located within the property's shallow front yard. Wide, stepped concrete walkways which lead from the sidewalk to the centrally located porch and a basement door well have also been installed recently. Buildings along the south side of the 400 block of W. Forest house multi-family residential, commercial, and religious uses and share a similar setback with shallow, open front yards. Fences, when present, are located at rear yards. A large educational building complex associated with Wayne State University which is in the process of construction is located at the north side of the 400 block of W. Forest.





445 W. Forest, current appearance





400 Block, W. Forest, south side of street



400 Block, W. Forest facing southwest, Google Streetview



400 Block, W. Forest facing northeast showing Wayne State U new construction across from 445 W. Forest. Google Streetview

## **PROPOSAL**

With the current submittal, the applicant is proposing to install two new patios areas within the property's front yard to support outdoor dining/seating. Each patio will be enclosed with fencing. Specifically, the project includes the following as per the submitted documentation:

### **West Patio**

- Install pea gravel surface at grade (per the submitted plan drawing). Note that the applicant has submitted the following two alternate pavement systems for the Commission's consideration:
  - 24"x24" porcelain tile pavers with pre-Cut Synthetic Turf "Diagonal" Kit with 4" Wide Turf Grids
  - 24"x24" permeable concrete mats with pre-cut turf infill
- Install two steps which shall lead from sidewalk to patio
- Install 3'-0" tall aluminum fence/gate to enclose patio. The fence will be installed atop a concrete footing which will measure +/- 10" in height (according to the applicant). The footing height will decrease as it slopes towards the southern portion of the parcel/patio
- At the eastern edge of the patio, atop the current masonry cap of the stair well which leads to the basement entry, install a fence which measures 42" inches in height from grade

### **East Patio**

- Install pea gravel surface at grade (per the submitted plan drawing) Note that the applicant has submitted the following two alternate pavement systems for the Commission's consideration:
  - 24"x24" porcelain tile pavers with pre-Cut Synthetic Turf "Diagonal" Kit with 4" Wide Turf Grids
  - 24"x24" permeable concrete mats with pre-cut turf infill
- Install 3'-0" tall aluminum fence/gate to enclose patio.
- Remove an existing ornamental tree

The project also includes the installation of mulch at the small open lawn area between the proposed new east and west patios. An aluminum fence which measures 42" front grade will also be installed at the current eastern masonry cap of the stair well which leads to the basement entry

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- As previously noted, no permanent fencing occurs at the front yards on the south side of the 400 block of W. Forest. However, uses within this block are mixed, to include residential, commercial, and educational. A commercial property on the south side of the street, at the western edge of the block displays, a fenced ramp that is directly adjacent to the sidewalk
- As noted in the “Existing Conditions” description, the front yard of the property is currently open. The proposed project will introduce a number of vertical/fencing elements which will measure 42” in height max within the front yard area. Also, per the submitted plan, gravel and mulch will be installed at grade vs grass, which is present within the yards directly adjacent to the property.
- As noted above, the applicant has provided the following two alternate surface coverings for the two patios which might provide an appearance that more closely resembles turf/a lawn:
  - 24”x24”porcelain tile pavers with pre-Cut Synthetic Turf "Diagonal" Kit with 4" Wide Turf Grids
  - 24”x24” permeable concrete mats with pre-cut turf infill

RE: the 24”x24”porcelain tile pavers with pre-Cut Synthetic Turf Grids, the HDC staff landscape architect noted that the synthetic turf grids will likely fade in color in time. He recommends that a live, low maintenance ground cover be installed instead of the synthetic turf grid if the system is employed. RE: the 24”x24” permeable concrete mats, the HDC staff landscape architect noted that it is possible that the turf infill will brown/die in time do to the amount of heat that the pavers will absorb, the minimal amount of spacing between each of the pavers, and the fact that the patios will experience a high level of traffic.

- The applicant has noted that they are proposing to erect fencing because code requires that barriers be installed at outdoor patios where liquor will be served
- Per the **Warren-Prentis Historic District** Element of Design #13, “*Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments*”

The overall impression is that residential streetscapes running east-west between Cass and Third Avenues are abundantly planted whereas the north-south streetscapes are not. Typical treatment of individual residential properties is a shallow, flat, front lawn area in grass turf, subdivided by a straight walk leading to the front entrance... While a pattern of continuous front lawns exists on West Forest Avenue and Prentis Avenue between Second and Third Avenues, low front yard fences and hedges along side lot lines exist on Prentis Avenue between Cass and Second Avenues. Hedges along front lot lines are common on West Hancock Avenue between Second and Third Avenues. Hedges along the front lot lines on Second Avenue commonly screen apartment buildings from the public right-of-way. The front yard of the building located on the southwest corner of Second Avenue and West Forest Avenue, known as the Forest Apartments, is fenced with wrought-iron pickets between brick wall piers. In general, there is a wide range in the type of fencing, with black wrought iron and chain-link common. Driveways are rare, although a few exist where apartment buildings and commercial buildings have off-street parking in the rear. Smaller apartment



buildings, such as those on Hancock Avenue between Second and Third Avenues, generally have shallow front lawns. The full-lot buildings are sometimes built up to the front lot line, abutting the public sidewalk. A few moderate to large apartment buildings have front courtyards that are attractively landscaped with grass turf and plantings. The one large-scale Victorian school building in the district has a graded, broad grass turf front lawn in keeping with its scale and importance, and a large paved parking lot in the rear. Other buildings constructed for institutional use have shallow lawns. Commercial and industrial buildings are generally placed on the front lot line abutting a wide sidewalk. The placement of trees on the tree lawn, or in planters between the public sidewalk and curb, varies from block to block and street to street, and is not consistent. There is a lack of street trees in some blocks. Replacement trees should be characteristic of the area and period. If American elms are planted, they should be disease resistant. Granite curbs should be retained where they still exist.

- Per the **Warren-Prentis Historic District** Element of Design #22, “*General environmental character*”

The Warren Prentis Historic is a dense, urban, mixed-use district primarily composed of residential structures but also containing commercial, institutional, and religious buildings as well as vacant land; its buildings reflect the area's development as one of rapid growth, intensification of land use, sudden decline, and recent revitalization. The vitality of the district is a result of the mixture of uses and the correspondingly diverse physical appearance of its architectural resources. The district's proximity to Wayne State University, the Cultural Center, and the Detroit Medical Center result in its being a locus for human activity.

- It is staff's opinion that the proposed location of patios at the front yard of 445 W. Forest, to include the introduction of new fencing, is generally in keeping with the “dense, urban, mixed-use” character of the district. The area will continue to present as a front yard and the addition of fencing and landscaping to support the current commercial use will not destroy the historic character of the building and immediate surrounds.
- Staff noted the presence of recently-installed basement windows (materiality unclear), new concrete steps/sidewalks at the front yard (leading to the front elevation basement entrance), and a new aluminum basement entry door at the front elevation. A review of HDC records for the property indicate that this work has not been approved by the Commission. A review of Google Streetview indicates that this work was undertaken sometime between 2016 and 2020, prior to the current application. The current applicant confirmed that he was not involved with the past work.

## ISSUES

- Staff does have general concerns that the proposed fencing would present an inharmonious appearance if it varies in height due to the variance of the height of the fence footings, the proposed 42” height for the fencing proposed for installation at the top of the basement stairwell, and the proposed height of the fence at the gates. It is staff's opinion that **all installed fencing/barriers/gates** should maintain a consistent height in elevation and shall measure no higher than 4'-0” in total (to include footings)

- The submitted drawings provide section drawings which detail the fencing and footing dimensions at the west patio. However, this information has not been provided for the east patio. The total height of the fencing at this patio (to include footings) is not clear to staff
- Per the district's Elements of Design, front yards are common along its east/west streets. It is staff's opinion that the introduction of mulch between the two proposed east/west patios and the introduction of a grey gravel surface at the patios is not in character with the turf/grass lawns which prevail within the properties that are adjacent to 445 W. Forest. Staff recommends that turf/plantings be installed at the area between the two proposed new patios and that the proposed alternate material/the 24"x24"porcelain tile pavers with a live, low maintenance ground cover be installed be installed at the two patio areas.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness**

HDC staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of appropriateness for the project because it generally meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and conforms to the Elements of Design for the Warren-Prentis Historic District. However, staff does recommend that the Commission issue this COA with the following conditions:

- **All installed fencing/barriers/gates** shall maintain a consistent height in elevation and shall measure no higher than 4'-0" in total (to include footings). The revised fencing proposal shall be submitted to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the project's permit. If staff determines that these elements do not meet the SOI standards/the Commission's conditions, the work items shall be submitted to the Commission for review at a regular meeting
- Grass turf/plantings shall be installed at the area between the two proposed new patios. Also, the proposed 24"x24"porcelain tile pavers with a live, low maintenance ground cover shall be installed be installed at the two patio area. The applicant may also propose an alternative surface material which better approximates grass/turf be installed at the two new proposed patio areas. The proposed alternative materials shall be submitted to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the project's permit. If staff determines that these elements do not meet the SOI standards and or Elements of Design for the neighborhood, the work items shall be submitted to the Commission for review at a regular meeting