

STAFF REPORT 10-14-2020 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 20-6879

ADDRESSES: 287-295-301 WATSON

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK

APPLICANT: CECILY C. KING/KIPLING DEVELOPMENT

OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT (PENDING SALE TO APPLICANT)

CITY AGENCY PER SECTION 21-2-5: HOUSING AND REVITALIZATION DEPT. (HRD)

DATE OF COMPLETE APPLICATION: 9-24-20

DATE OF STAFF VISIT: 10-12-20

SCOPE: ERECT TWO NEW MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS (16 UNITS) AND DETACHED CARPORT

EXISTING CONDITIONS

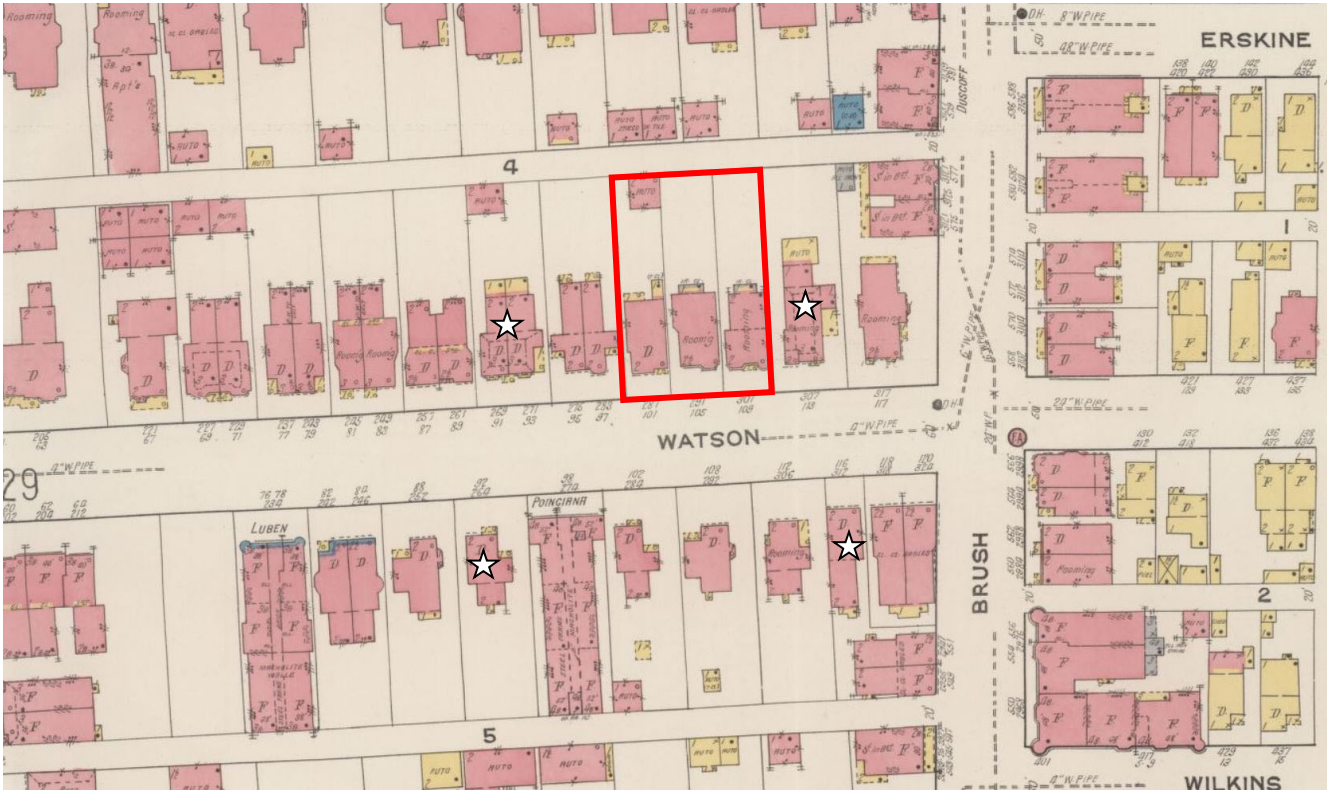
The proposed development site is on the north side of Watson between John R and Brush Streets, immediately adjacent to the mansard-roofed nineteenth-century mansion at 311 Watson. The site is a combination of three vacant parcels: 287, 295, and 301 Watson, creating a development parcel 150' deep with 100' of frontage. This block of Watson Street, like many in Brush Park prior to its recent wave of construction, has only a handful of historic homes extant, and is predominantly open space. As such, interventions in this framework of minimal existing fabric have an outsized ability to recast the architectural character of the street.



View of vacant development site, looking north. 311 Watson at right. Staff Photo.



Existing conditions, aerial view. Development parcel outlined in red. Detroit Parcel Viewer.



Conditions circa 1921, Sanborn Map. Buildings on Watson visible in the image above are marked with a star.



View of 269 Watson and vacant parcels to the west. Staff Photo.



View of 264 Watson, across the street from vacant development site, looking southwest. Staff Photo.



View of vacant land across the street from site, looking south towards downtown. Staff Photo.



View looking west along Watson. 311 Watson at right, 310 Watson visible at left. Staff Photo.

PROPOSAL

Twelve (12) terraced townhomes and four (4) carriage houses, per the submitted drawings, are proposed for the site. The twelve townhomes are evenly divided among a single building formed into six distinct masses at the front of the parcel, variously exhibiting flat or mansard-style roofs. The blocks are cleanly articulated and vary slightly in their setbacks while keeping a consistent and readable streetwall. Traditional materials, forms, stoops, and opening sizes are employed to relate to the nearby historic fabric, especially 311 Watson. Modern elements, including metal panels and contemporary windows, complement the historic cues. The carriage homes, also combined into a single articulated mass, are at the rear of the parcel and are more aggressively modern, exhibiting raking roof planes and a corrugated metal exterior. Covered parking and internal vehicular circulation is provided at the center of the site, generally hidden from view.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Brush Park Historic District is a large, formerly densely-populated residential district close to downtown, stretching from Woodward generally east to Beaubien, and from the Fisher Freeway north to Mack. It was designated in 1980, but suffered substantial demolition in subsequent decades due to neglect and disinvestment. In the last five years, renovation and new construction have transformed many blocks of the district.
- A defining feature of the Brush Park Historic District amongst its historic buildings is the use of red/brown brick, natural stone, and articulation of exterior surfaces (windows, ornamentation) with pronounced recession, projection, and shadow lines. This approach to architectural features should extend to new buildings to protect the integrity of the district, per the Standards. In staff's opinion, the proposed design deftly incorporates appropriate materials and articulation. It models a thoughtful contextuality while establishing itself as a creative intervention in the historic fabric. The more architecturally adventurous structure is at the rear of the site, a positioning which shows some deference towards the context.
- Per the Housing and Revitalization Department, the site was marketed by the City in the second half of 2019, and this team was selected out of four proposals. HRD has been working with the developer, is fully supportive of the project, and hopes to achieve City Council approval for land sale prior to the coming recess or early 2021. The Brush Park CDC is also reportedly supportive of the project.
- The District would clearly benefit from the additional density represented by the development. Brush Park was historically a very dense residential district.

ISSUES

- No issues

RECOMMENDATION

Since a city land sale is involved, the Commission is asked for two decisions related to this project:

Section 21-2-5, Effects of projects on districts

Since the project involves a discretionary action by the city involving a sale of publicly-owned property in or adjacent to a city-owned historic district, the Commission has the obligation 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.*

Staff recommends that the Commission find a demonstrable effect, and that it is likely to be **beneficial**.

Section 21-2-73, Certificate of Appropriateness

It is staff's opinion that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Staff recommends that the Commission approve a COA for the proposed application, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Brush Park Historic District's Elements of Design.