

STAFF REPORT 12-14-2022 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 22-8150

ADDRESS: 84 EDMUND PLACE

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK

APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: IMMERSIVE DESIGN STUDIO PLC/PIERRE R. ROBERSON, AIA, NOMA

PROPERTY OWNER: BLUE STAR PROPERTY INVESTORS LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11-22-2022

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11-28-2022

SCOPE: ERECT NEW MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS



View of 84 Edmund Place, to the south (vacant lot). Staff photo, November 28, 2022.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The property, located on the south side of the first block east of Woodward (towards John R), is currently occupied by a paved parking area at its southern half adjacent to, and accessed from, the alley; and a grassy lawn with a non-historic sidewalk fence at its northern half, at Edmund Place.

The development parcel, in the historic era, was two separate built-up parcels (see Sanborn map, below). Now combined, this empty parcel is framed by two historic 19th century homes. To the west, 104 Edmund Place, a restored Queen Anne mansion with Second Empire flourishes, dominates the vista. To the east stands 64 Edmund Place, a brick mansion with a classical pediment that has suffered the loss of historic details, and which has not yet emerged from decades of neglect.



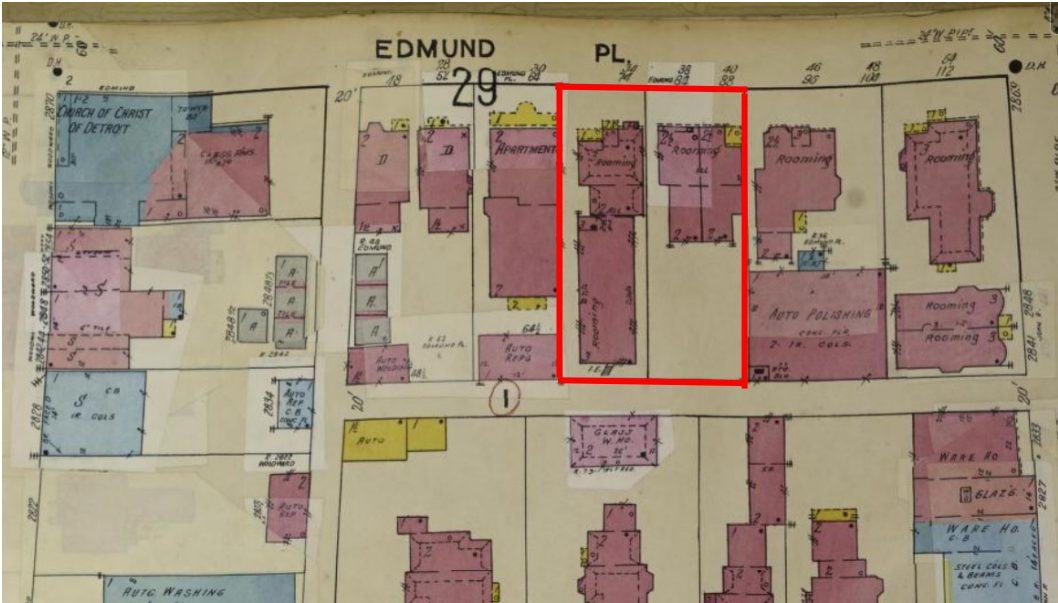
View of 104 Edmund Place, immediately west of the subject parcel. Staff photo, November 28, 2022.



View of vacant 64 Edmund Place, immediately east of the subject parcel. Staff photo, November 28, 2022.



Subject site outlined in yellow. North is up. Detroit Parcel Viewer.



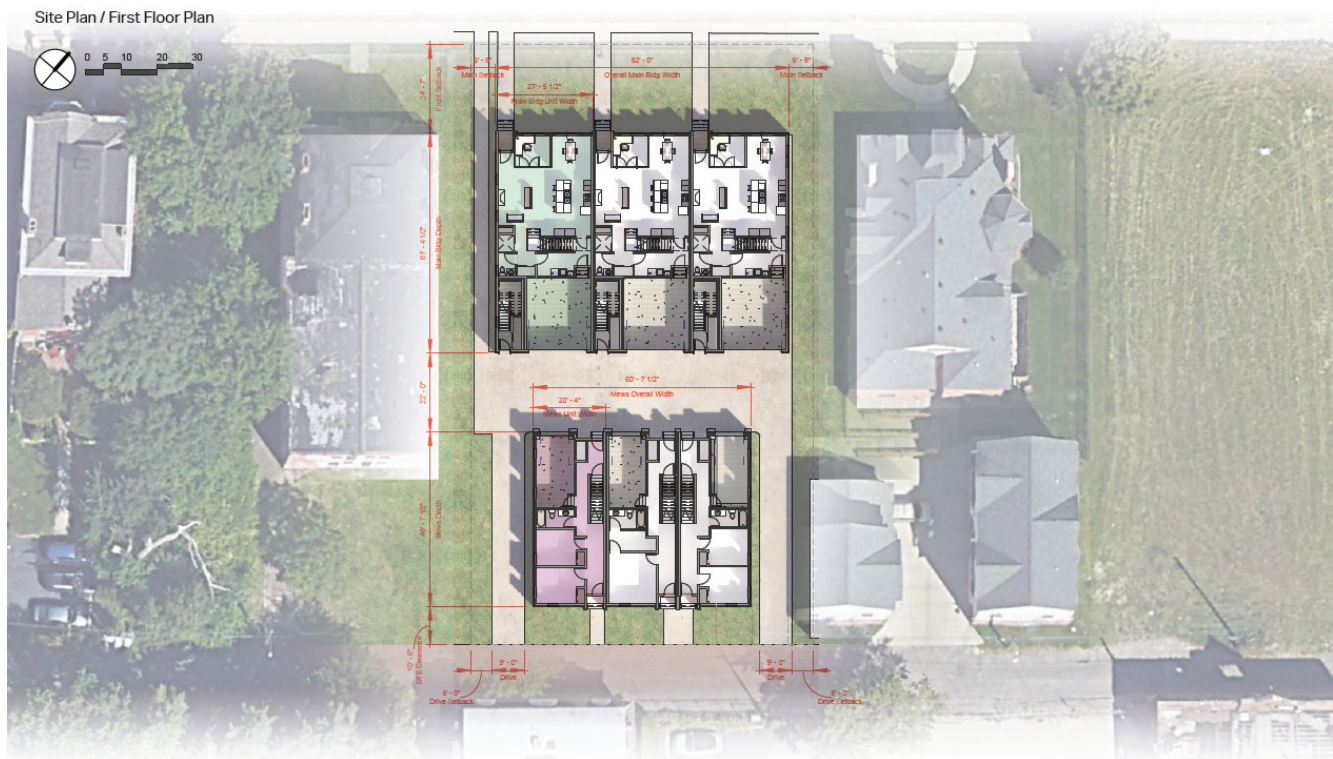
84-88 Edmund Place, circa 1950 (Sanborn Map). Current development parcel (outlined in red) once held two large brick homes altered into rooming houses, one with a large addition to the south. Note historic density of this vicinity.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes a 9-unit, multi-family housing development, in two sections consisting of townhomes and apartments, including garages, per the submitted drawings, narrative, and documents. The development will be of wood-frame construction with brick veneer and a cementitious rain-screen system.



From applicant's submission: Frontage elevation showing context.



From applicant's submission: Site plan/first floor plan

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- The Brush Park Historic District was established in 1980.
- A building on this site burned in the 1990s and was approved for demolition by this Commission via a Certificate of Appropriateness issued in December 1999.
- In the last decade, the district has seen substantial HDC-approved redevelopment of similar vacant parcels, typically in a contemporary design inflected with contextual cues. Scale, massing, textures, and rebuilding the historic density of the district has been important to the Commission. Per NPS Guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, it is not required that new additions to a traditional historic district reproduce obsolete historic styles.
- As a guide to new construction, the Elements of Design for this district does offer the following (excerpted) relevant points:
 - **Element 1, Height:** *Height varies in the district from one to 11 stories...Later changes included the construction of apartment buildings among the houses, the majority of which are three stories in height...In the case of the 19th Century houses located between Woodward Avenue and Brush, the 2½ story height implies more height in feet than usual, since ceiling heights in these houses are unusually high.*
 - **Element 2, Proportion of buildings' front facades:** *Buildings in the district are usually taller than wide...*
 - **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:** *Areas of void generally constitute between 15 and 35 percent of the total façade area, excluding the roof. Proportions of the openings themselves are generally taller than wide; in some cases, vertically proportioned units are combined to fill an opening wider than tall.*
 - **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:** *Victorian structures in the district often display great freedom in the placement of openings in the facades...In later apartments, openings tend to be very regular.*
 - **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets:** *The area between Woodward and Brush appears to have been developed in a very regular spacing...this regularity has been disrupted by the demolition of many of the houses, and the vacant land resulting...*
 - **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections:** *Most buildings have or had a porch or entrance projection...*
 - **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** *By far the most prevalent material in the district is common brick; other forms of brick, stone and wood trim are common... Some later buildings have stucco wall surfaces...*
 - **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** *The most common relationship of textures in the district is the low relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted to the smoother or rougher surfaces of stone or wood trim...*
 - **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** *Brick red predominates...other natural brick and stone colors are also present...*
 - **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** *On the buildings of the Victorian period, elaborate detail in wood, stone, or sheet metal was common; areas included porches, window and door surrounds, cornices, dormers, and other areas. Later buildings are generally simpler, but include less elaborate detail in similar areas.*
 - **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** *Examples of many roof shapes, including pitched gable roofs, hip roofs, mansard roofs, and gambrel roofs are present. Different types are sometimes combined in a single structure...Later apartment buildings and commercial buildings generally have flat roofs not visible from the ground.*
 - **Element 12, Walls of continuity:** *Some of the later apartments have not been set back to the same line as the houses amongst which they were built...Where buildings are continuous, a wall of continuity is created.*
 - **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** *The major landscape feature of the district is vacant land, which creates a feeling that buildings are missing in the district....*
 - **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures:** *There is a large quantity of open space in the area, due to demolition of buildings...The feeling created is that buildings are missing*

and should be present.

- **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** Later apartments are in scale with simple but large elements near the ground and repetitive window openings above, frequently capped by a substantial cornice.
- **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevations:** A substantial majority of the buildings in the district have front facades vertically expressed...
- **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** ...older houses on the east-west streets between Woodward Avenue and Brush have some setback, which varies from street to street, though generally consistent in any one block. Later apartments and commercial structures in that area often ignore the previously established setback...
- **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** Later apartments and commercial buildings often fill a much higher percentage of the lot, sometimes approaching or reaching complete lot coverage...
- **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** The older houses in the district are generally characterized by a high degree of complexity within the facades...later apartments and commercial buildings tend to have more classical decorative elements of a simpler kind.
- **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** The vacant land in the area, largely the result of demolition, creates long-distance views and views of individual buildings from unusual angles which are foreign to the character of the neighborhood as an intensely developed urban area. Garages and coach houses are located in the rear of residential properties and are generally oriented to the alley.
- **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** Asymmetrical but balanced compositions are common. Later apartments are generally symmetrical.
- **Element 22, General environmental character:** The environmental character is of an old urban neighborhood which has undergone, and is undergoing, considerable change...
- The proposed dominant materials, including brick, cementitious panels, and wood, are grounded in the materials and expressions used on historic buildings in the district, or are modern analogs. At the front, openings (including paired windows), materials, and architectural detail relationships are deployed and articulated in a manner that is appropriate for a new building within the historic context. In staff's opinion, therefore, the *main facades* of the proposed design (i.e., both street- and alley-facing elevations) incorporate appropriate materials, textures, articulation, and massing generally aligned with the Elements of Design.
- The increasing density of Brush Park directly addresses the problem of vacant land created by demolition as identified in Elements 13, 14, and 20 by the framers of the 1980 ordinance establishing the district. This proposed project will continue that positive trend by reintroducing buildings to a vacant parcel in support of "the character of the neighborhood as an intensely developed urban area."
- However, consistent with the design review report provided by PDD (accompanying this historic staff report), in our opinion the *non-primary elevations* (sides and inward-facing rear facades of each building) lack adequate texture and articulation, and seem flat and disconnected from the main facades. Elements of Design 3, 7, 8, and 10 as described above are lacking. While these exposures would not have to be as well-developed as the primary facades, certain textures, shadow lines and other elements present at the front should be carried around to the sides and rear, consistent with historic prototypes. There may be a number of different ways to accomplish this in a modern spirit, including the addition of materials and detailing present on the main facades, more deliberate recess and framing of window openings, adding additional paired openings, etc.
- Product data and material selections for exterior elements including doors, windows, railings, light fixtures, etc., have not been submitted.

ISSUES

- The non-primary elevations need to be further developed.
- Material and product selection for doors, windows, railings, and other exterior elements should be provided in a subsequent revision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Staff recommends that the proposal for a new pair of multi-family buildings at 84 Edmund Place should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Brush Park Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- The design be further developed at the non-primary elevations consistent with input from PDD Design Review and Historic staff. Upon receipt of an updated design, staff may approve the revisions for permit if consistent with the Elements of Design and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, or return the design to the Commission for further review if necessary.
- Product selections for exterior elements including but not limited to doors, windows, and railings be provided for staff review.