

**STAFF REPORT: 12/14/2022 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: J. ROSS**

**ADDRESS: 7441 SECOND AVENUE (AKA WJBK TV STUDIO BUILDING)**

**APPLICATION NO: #22-8155**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA**

**APPLICANT: RAID JAMIL/HAMILTON ANDERSON ASSOCIATES**

**OWNER: MIDNIGHT GOLF**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 12/1/2022**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/22/2022**

**SCOPE: REPLACE WINDOWS AND ROOF TO INCLUDE REMOVAL OF HVAC & TELEVISION BROADCASTING EQUIPMENT**



**7441 Second Avenue, current conditions (12/1/2022 staff photos). Note that the historic-age rooftop antenna tower is not visible from this angle**



**7441 Second Avenue, current conditions (12/1/2022 staff photos)**

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The building at 7441 Second Avenue is a vacant, Neo-Georgian Revival Commercial building that was erected in 1956 to house the WJBK studios. Per the National Register of Historic Places Registration form entitled “WJBK-TV Studio Building”:

The former WJBK-TV Studios building stands at the southwest corner of Second Avenue and Bethune Street in the New Center area of Detroit which is approximately four miles north of downtown. To the south are the former General Motors headquarters building and the Fisher Building, and across Second Avenue is the Albert Kahn Building, all of which are National Historic Landmarks.

The Second Avenue facade (front facade) and the north and south side of the office section of the building are faced in dark red brick laid in common bond with a course of headers every sixth course. The central five bays of the symmetrical eleven-bay front project slightly, with the central three bays projecting a bit more and topped by a pediment, with an oval classical window in its center. The Second Avenue facade has a central entrance that, with non-original aluminum glass entry doors, is fronted by a limestone portico at the first floor. Two limestone Ionic unfluted columns support a flat-top entablature with a low two-part architrave, tall frieze and classical cornice of limestone. A double-hung window with a stone surround rises above the door at the second floor and a stone trimmed oval window is in the center of the pediment above. Equally spaced aluminum, six-over-six, double-hung windows run across the remainder of the front elevation in the first and second stories. The windows are arranged symmetrically with three bays at the north and south ends, and a single bay on each side of the central bay containing the portico and another window on each side. The second floor is topped with a wide stone frieze and cornice running below a brick parapet wall surrounding the flat roof. A limestone beltcourse runs below the first-floor windows. All of the windows have roll-up metal blinds installed on the exterior of the building. The front door has a roll-up metal blind as well.

The north and south sides of the office section of the building continue the window and wall treatment from the front of the building. There are five bays of double-hung windows on each side facade. The rear end of the Bethune Street side facade's office portion includes two more window bays set under the same stone frieze and brick parapet. The studio section's side walls are set in from the office section's side walls, slightly on the south side but much more on the north facing Bethune. The studio section's exterior does not reflect the Georgian Revival styling of the office section, though it also has red brick walls of the same bond, and on the Bethune side of the building there is a small projecting wood and glass entrance vestibule. A row of double-hung windows that match the remainder of the building are spaced equally along a one-story side section of the north/Bethune elevation in the studio section. The south and west sides of the studio section have few openings with the exception of loading and pedestrian doors. There is a small, one-story garage attached to the rear of the building. The roof of the studio contains a brick elevator penthouse, a number of large satellite dishes, and a tall broadcast antenna tower.

Two service staircase towers are located at opposite sides of the building on the north and south ends. A large freight elevator is located at the western edge of the building, accessed from the parking lot. A side entrance on the Bethune Street/north facade allows for access directly into the large studio. An entrance from the rear facade (western facade) allows for access into the building from the parking lot.

## **PROPOSAL**

Per the submitted materials, the applicant is seeking approval of the following work items:

- Replace all of the existing 6/6 aluminum, double-hung windows (true divided lite) with new 6/6 aluminum double-hung simulated divided lite windows
- Remove the existing steel rollup shutters and associated hardware
- Remove existing flat roof system, to include rooftop HVAC and television broadcasting equipment (satellite dishes and antennas)
- Install a new flat, built-up roofing system

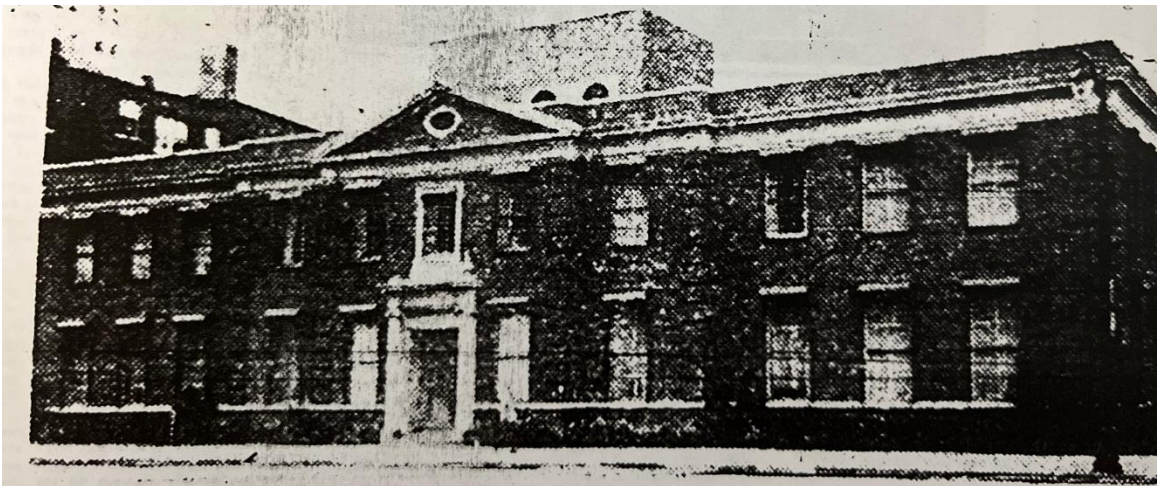


## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was designated in 1982
- The building was individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 2017 due to its significance in the areas of **Architecture** (as Detroit's only building designed by renowned architect John Volk) and **Communications** (for housing pioneering Detroit television station WJBK from 1956-1971). The NRHP designation determined that the building's period of significance is 1956-1967.
- A review of historic aerial maps indicated that the current large antenna tower to the rear of the rooftop was present in 1967, during the building's period of significance. It is staff's opinion that the antenna is a distinctive character defining feature of the building as it remains as a highly-visible, tangible link to the property's original use as a television studio/WJBK's first permanent home in Detroit. Similar to a church's steeple, the antenna tower is viewable from a distance and clearly marks the property's historic function.
- An historic photo of the building indicates that none of the current satellite dishes were present in 1971. The two small satellite dishes which are mounted on the elevator penthouse were present at the date of the district's designation while the remaining rooftop satellite dishes were installed after the district's designation. It is staff's opinion that none of the existing satellite dishes are historic age or distinctive character-defining elements of the building.
- A review of the designation slides for the property indicated that the current 6/6, aluminum windows were present at the time of designation. The windows appear to be of historic-age and are significant character-defining elements of the building in staff's opinion. Also, the existing windows do appear to be in good condition/staff did not witness a wholesale "severity of deterioration" which would "require replacement" of all of the windows per the Standards.
- It appears that the applicant's primary motivation for the replacement of the windows is because the current units are "energy inefficient". They have noted that it will cost an estimated \$12,000 per unit to retrofit the windows with double paned glazing units. However, there are alternate means to achieve greater energy efficiency while retaining the existing windows, to include interior or exterior storm windows.
- An historic photo of the building indicates that the current rollup security shutters were present at the building in 1971. While these elements are historic age/over 50 years old, they do not speak to the building's areas of significance (Architectural and Communications). Rather, they detract from the building's architectural character/the building's Neo-Georgian Revival stylistic detailing. It is staff's opinion that these elements are not distinctive character defining features at the property.



7441 Second  
aerial map,  
1967. Note  
presence of  
antenna tower



**Public TV takes over Channel 2's New Center building**

7441 Second Avenue, ca. 1971







7441 Second Avenue, designation slides, appearance in 1982

## ISSUES

- As noted above, it is staff's opinion that the existing aluminum windows are distinctive character-defining features of the building. The current application has not presented adequate documentation that the windows display a level of deterioration that merits their wholesale removal/replacement. Therefore, the proposed removal of the existing windows does not meet Secretary of the Interior's Standards in staff's opinion
- Also, should the Commission approve the removal of the existing windows please note that the application narrative/scope of work states the proposed new windows will match the existing. Please see the attached drawings and narrative which provide dimensioned details for the existing and proposed new windows for comparison. Per the submission, the frame (head/jamb/sill) of the new windows is thicker/wider than the existing as it will be increased in width by about 1 1/2" to 1 3/4" all the way around. The amount of visible glass in the new window will also decrease by 4" versus the existing. Staff acknowledges that the new windows are probably the closest production match that can be found for windows of this size, as contemporary windows include thermal breaks and other factors (e.g, accommodating heavier dual-glazed panes) that increase thickness. However, in staff's opinion, this reinforces the importance of retaining the historic windows and their streamlined design. Retaining the existing window units and the addition of secondary/storm windows is a more appropriate approach in staff's opinion as the thicker frame and the reduced amount of glass of the proposed new windows will have a negative impact on the building's historic appearance.
- As noted above, it is staff's opinion that the large antenna tower to the rear of the rooftop is a significant character defining feature of the building. Therefore, proposed removal of the tower does not meet the Standards.

## RECOMMENDATION

### **Recommendation #1 - Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness**

HDC staff recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the proposed window scope and the removal of the large rooftop antenna tower because the work does not conform to the district's Elements of Design and does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, in particular Standards #:

- 2.) *The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.*
- 5.) *Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.*
- 6.) *Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.*

**Recommendation #2 - 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 following work items as they conform to the district’s Elements of Design and meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards:

- Replace the existing flat roof with a new flat roofing system/built up membrane
- Remove the rooftop satellite dishes, small antennas, and HVAC equipment
- Remove the existing steel rollup shutters and associated equipment

However, staff recommends that this approval be issued with the following condition:

- The existing large rooftop broadcast antenna tower shall be retained at its current location