

**STAFF REPORT: 2/8/2023 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: J. ROSS**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: 2023-8286**

**ADDRESS: 450 AMSTERDAM**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW AMSTERDAM**

**APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: ROSS HOEKSTRA/ARCHITECT (MCINTOSH PORIS ASSOCIATES)**

**OWNER: SARAH PAVELKO/GREATWATER OPPORTUNITY CAPITAL**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 3/20/2023**

**DATE OF STAFF VISIT: 4/4/2023**

**SCOPE OF WORK: ESTABLISH LANDSCAPING/HARDSCAPING, CHANGE TO PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WINDOWS**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The building located at 450 Amsterdam Avenue was erected in 1904-1906 and designed by George Mason and the Trussed Concrete Steel Company, engineers. Per the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board:

This building was the main assembly plant for the Cadillac Motor Car Company, which was founded by Henry Leland in 1902. The original Cadillac plant (located on the same site) had been destroyed by fire just prior to the construction of this building. George D. Mason, who designed this building, was a prominent Detroit architect whose commissions included the Detroit Masonic Temple and the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Mason's use of reinforced concrete provided protection from fire, provided more floor and window space, and protected against damage from vibration. It should be noted that the Palms Apartments of 1901 was Detroit's first building to use reinforced concrete and was designed by the brief partnership of Mason and Kahn; in this case, Kahn's Trussed Steel firm was involved. The Cadillac Motor Car Company was completed in sixty-seven days, in the same year that Albert Kahn completed the first reinforced concrete industrial structure in Detroit- the Packard Motor Car Company Building Number 10. Both structures were pioneers in the use of reinforced concrete for industrial buildings. Cadillac occupied the building until 1920, when a new facility was built in another area of the city. The building was then purchased by Louis Rose of Rose Realty Company in 1954. Westcott Paper Products was a tenant in the building. In 1965, Westcott purchased the building, which still served as Westcott's headquarters at the turn of the century.

The building is three stories in height (with one-story wings at the east and north elevations) and was constructed with reinforced concrete and brick. The rear, one-story addition was erected with concrete masonry units. The building features a six-bay wide, four-bay deep main mass which faces south on Amsterdam Avenue. To the north of the main mass, the building steps in two bays at the east elevation and one bay at the west elevation forming the building's T-plan. The roof is flat. Exterior walls are primarily brick, although concrete is present at the rear one-story addition's north and west elevations, at the first story at the west elevation, and at stories two and three of the west elevation's stair tower. Many of the fenestration openings retain historic-age steel windows. Some window openings have been infilled with glassblock (mainly at the west elevation, first story). Still other window openings include non-historic vinyl sliding windows with masonry infill/surrounds. The primary entrance, which is located at the south elevation is a non-historic aluminum storefront door with aluminum and glassblock sidelites. A non-historic awning shelters this entrance. Other entrances are non-historic steel overhead

doors and non-historic hinged single doors. A loading dock which includes a masonry dock and a steel-frame canopy is located at the building's northeastern corner.



450 Amsterdam, current condition



**Google aerial facing south showing rear one-story addition, 2022**



**Google Streetview, facing southwest showing east elevation, one-story addition. The Commission approved its removal at the February 2023 meeting. A new fenced patio will be installed at this location.**



**Google Streetview, facing northwest showing east elevation, one-story addition and loading dock canopy. The Commission approved the removal of the addition and canopy at the February 2023 meeting.**



Google Streetview, facing southwest showing east elevation, showing the dock canopy. The Commission approved the canopy's removal at the February 2023 meeting. Per the applicant, the existing will be restored and a concrete ADA ramp will be added in this location.

## PROPOSAL

The Commission approved a proposal to rehabilitate the building at its 2/8/2023 regular meeting. Specific work items presented to the Commission at the February meeting included the replacement of all of the existing windows with new units, the enlargement of window openings, the replacement of the roof, and the demolition of the existing one-story wing and the steel loading dock canopy at the east elevation. This Commission proffered an approval of the proposal with a condition that all window openings were enlarged in a consistent manner. With the current submission, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to undertake a number of site improvements within the parcel. Also, the applicant has submitted new information to support their desire to maintain the size of the existing window openings at the front elevation, Specific work items included in the current application include the following:

- Add new paving and decomposed granite per submission
- Install new fencing/gates to include a 6'-0"-high metal gate at the north, south, east and property boundaries). A sliding gate will be located at the main entry to the parking lot; a 6'-0" high metal wire fence at the east elevation patio area; and a fence at the rear pet area (height, style, and material not specified)
- Establish a new dog park area to the rear of the building to be enclosed with a fence (height, style, and material not specified) and to include a pet waste station
- Install new landscaping, a new 7'x7'x8.2' aluminum pagoda, furniture, fire pit, and bike racks
- Install a new concrete ADA ramp at the rear, east elevation
- Install a new dumpster enclosure (materials and dimensions not specified)
- At south/front elevation retain existing window opening size and install new aluminum windows

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- As previously noted, the applicant submitted a proposal to the Commission at the 2/8/2023 regular meeting which included the replacement of all the existing windows with new aluminum units and the enlargement of the window openings at the side and rear elevations. The size of the window openings at the front/south elevation were to be maintained at their current dimensions/not enlarged. The Commission issued an approval of the proposal with a condition that all window openings be enlarged in a consistent manner, requiring the front/south elevation window openings to be enlarged. With the current application, the project architects have provided additional documentation/detail drawings of the conditions at the front/south elevation versus the side and rear elevation which indicates the following, per their submitted narrative:
  - *These details show the difference in the design of the lintels that was discovered along the south facade compared to the typical detail seen throughout the building. The typical detail uses a profile cast iron lintel embedded between 2 wythes of brick. They extend 1 brick past the window opening and are easily removed with minimal disturbance to the brick that is to remain. Over time this T member absorbs water and causes the cast iron to expand through rust packing. This then causes the window to compress and eventually bow out or fail like we see consistently throughout the building.*

*The south facade lintel is comprised of two C profile steel members that surround 3 wythes of brick; 1 on the exterior and two on the interior. They are more substantial because they are spanning larger width openings on the south facade. They extend to 3 rows of brick past the window opening and require removing the entire top 3 rows of brick to remove the lintel. Also, because of the profile difference, they do not have the same issues with water absorption and are in good condition without risk of inevitable failure like the typical detail. These members are original and provide structural support to the facade which is different than the North, East, and West condition. Removing these members will require substantially more original brick to be removed from the facade and additional work to maintain the integrity of the brick that is to remain. These differences are why we feel it is important to maintain the window opening size and lintels as they are along the south facade compared to our approach for the rest of the windows for this building.*

Staff accepts the applicant's reasoning behind maintaining the existing size of the window openings at the front/south elevation and recommends approval of the scope item.

## ISSUES

- None

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission**

It is staff's opinion that the project generally conforms to the Elements of Design for the New Amsterdam Historic District and meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work with the following conditions:

- The fencing at the dog area shall measure no more than 6'-0" in height. HDC staff shall be afforded the opportunity to review and approve the final fence style and height prior to the issuance of the project's permit.
- HDC staff shall be afforded the opportunity to review and approve the final specs of the dumpster enclosure prior to the issuance of the project's permit.