

STAFF REPORT 10-11-2023 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8517

ADDRESS: 20119 WISCONSIN, AKA 8730 CHIPPEWA

HISTORIC DISTRICTS: WILLIAM E. HIGGINBOTHAM SCHOOL HISTORIC DISTRICT, JOHNSON RECREATION CENTER AND JOE LOUIS PLAYFIELD HISTORIC DISTRICT

APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: BLAKE HILL/MCINTOSH PORIS ASSOCIATES

OWNER/DEVELOPER: CITY OF DETROIT (PENDING SALE); URGE IMPRINT

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 08-21-2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 09-01-2023

SCOPE: REHABILITATE SCHOOL BUILDING, ERECT MULTI-FAMILY BUILDINGS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is a single corner parcel upon which stands the vacant Higginbotham School. The building is just under 50,000 SF and, along with parking lots, occupies a 2.5-acre site that itself is the southwest corner of a much larger parcel including Joe Louis Playfield and the Johnson Recreation Center (also a local historic district).



View of existing conditions at Higginbotham, looking to the northwest Staff photo, September 1, 2023.

Per the 2021 report from the Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB):

Higginbotham School was built to house African American kindergarteners through eight graders by the Detroit Public Schools in 1926-1927 and expanded in 1944 and 1946. It was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under the Public Schools of Detroit Multiple Property Submission in 2011 and included in the 20th Century Civil Rights in Detroit Reconnaissance and Intensive Level Survey, 2019.

The period of significance for the property is 1926-1955. The building's namesake was the district's school building architect, working in the firm Malcomson & Higginbotham, for thirty years (1893-1923), which designed three quarters of the city's school buildings during that period. The architect of this building, Chester

Sorensen, had previously worked for the firm.

Architecturally, HDAB describes the building comprehensively, as such:

The William E. Higginbotham School faces east onto Wisconsin Avenue, a vacated street, on the northwest side of Detroit. Its U-shaped footprint occupies the parcel which is located approximately nine miles northwest of downtown. This is a one and two-and-a-half story brick building, with a flat-centered, Spanish tile hip roof, that was constructed in 1926-27 and expanded in 1944 and 1946. The school's most significant architectural features are focused on the off-center entrance bay and reflect the Mediterranean style. Higginbotham School appears to be in good condition on the exterior and retains a high degree of historic integrity.

Higginbotham School is oriented eastward towards the Johnson Recreation Center and Joe Louis Playfield, City of Detroit recreation facilities, with a secondary façade (containing the auditorium entrance), facing southward toward Chippewa Avenue. A surface parking lot is adjacent to the school building on the north and another on the east, across the vacated right-of-way of Wisconsin Avenue, connected to the Johnson Playfield. The asymmetrical front façade of the building faces Wisconsin Avenue and its entrance occupies the second of six bays from the south end. Higginbotham School had a series of additions constructed. The original school building faced Wisconsin Avenue, and was a rectangular structure. In 1928, just a year after opening, an addition was constructed that extended west along Chippewa Avenue. The differing colors of Spanish clay tiles on the roofs reveal the distinction in these two eras of construction. In 1944 another addition was completed that included an auditorium, six classrooms, and gymnasium/lunchroom. The auditorium has a separate entrance facing Chippewa Street. A final addition (called the "second addition" on the site plan) to Higginbotham School was constructed in 1946. ...

The Higginbotham School is faced in beige brick set in a common bond pattern. The Wisconsin Street entrance bay of Higginbotham School projects slightly from the rest of the front façade. It is set off by a pattern of stacked, concentric, quoin-like tile squares with outlines of brown brick running along its side and top edges. This same running concentric tile pattern lines the corners of the building as well. Double-doors with patterned lights (surrounds are now brightly painted) and a round arched transom above comprise the entrance; a metal balconette and large, curvilinear-arched, multi-light window are above at second-story level. Panels of ornamentation extend from the flanking column capitals of the entrance, rising to the height of the second-story window, and are topped with miniature engaged obelisks. To the north of the entrance section is a brick bell tower rising from the ground; it is topped with a side-facing, tiled, gable roof above double louvered openings rising above the roofline. The last bay on the north end of the front façade is divided from the one next to it by a second bell tower.

Windows are arranged into groupings of five, four-over-four wood sash windows (although one window in each classroom has been replaced by a modern anodized aluminum window to facilitate emergency egress), the first-story window grouping has a continuous stone sill course. According to a 2008-2009 survey of Detroit public school buildings, wood sash windows are quite rare, as they have been replaced on the vast majority of schools in the city during the early 21st century. A cartouche occupies the second-story end of the Chippewa Avenue façade, above a grouping of three windows on the first floor. The cast stone cartouche features the lamp of knowledge, stars, fleur-de-lis and ceramic tile inserts. Decorative scrolls and classical motifs surround the cartouche. The ell of the south elevation is set back, and a five-sided, one-story entrance bay projects from its western end. Portions of the school building's roof are hipped and portions are flat.

The context of the Higginbotham School site is medium-density, single-family residential. The property itself is suffering from deferred maintenance and obvious deterioration, with many damaged windows, failure of roofing, and other work requiring immediate attention. The property is currently encircled by a perimeter chain-link fence which has been compromised in at least one location (along Indiana Street). Dumping has occurred

near and on the property. School buildings, given their great size and multiple entrance opportunities, have been a challenge for the city and its agencies to protect from scrapping or trespass, despite continuous efforts.



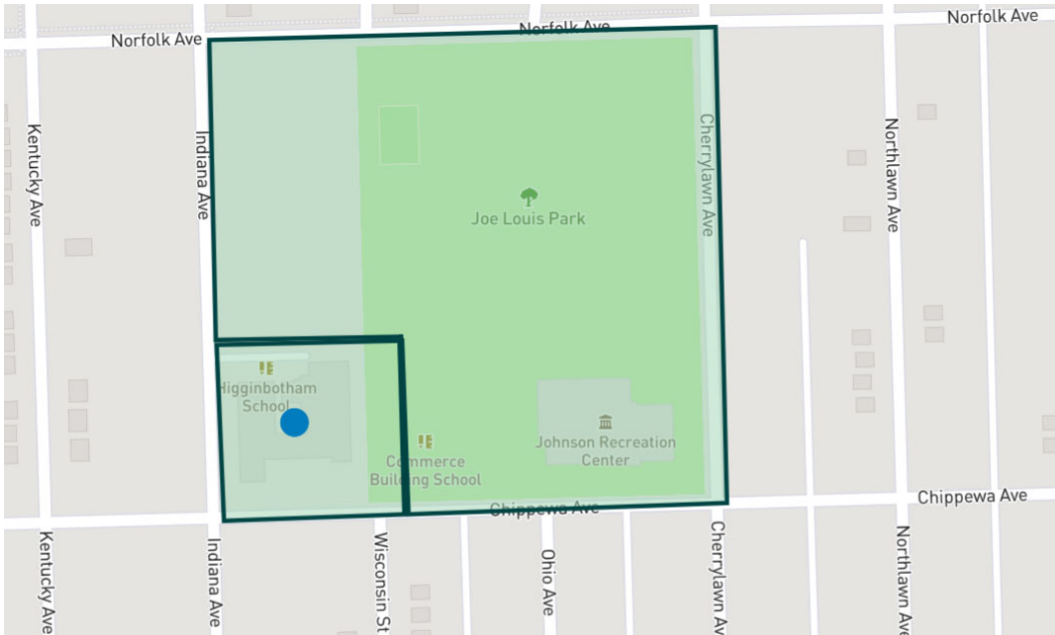
View of existing conditions at Higginbotham, looking north from Chippewa. Note damage to roof and boarded windows. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.



Existing conditions at the rear, showing areas of flat roof and utility parking lots. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.



Detroit parcel viewer, tax parcel for 20119 Wisconsin outlined in yellow.



The Higginbotham Historic District (indicated by blue dot) encompasses the entirety the building but may not encompass the entirety of the building's tax parcel shown above, despite text in HDAB report claiming that it does.¹ Nevertheless, this district is adjacent to and surrounded on two sides by the larger Johnson Recreation Center and Joe Louis Playfield Historic District. As such, all portions of the project are subject to Commission review.

¹ **“Boundary Justification:** The boundaries described above include the William E. Higginbotham School building and cover the parcel associated with the school building.” from page 3, HDAB report.



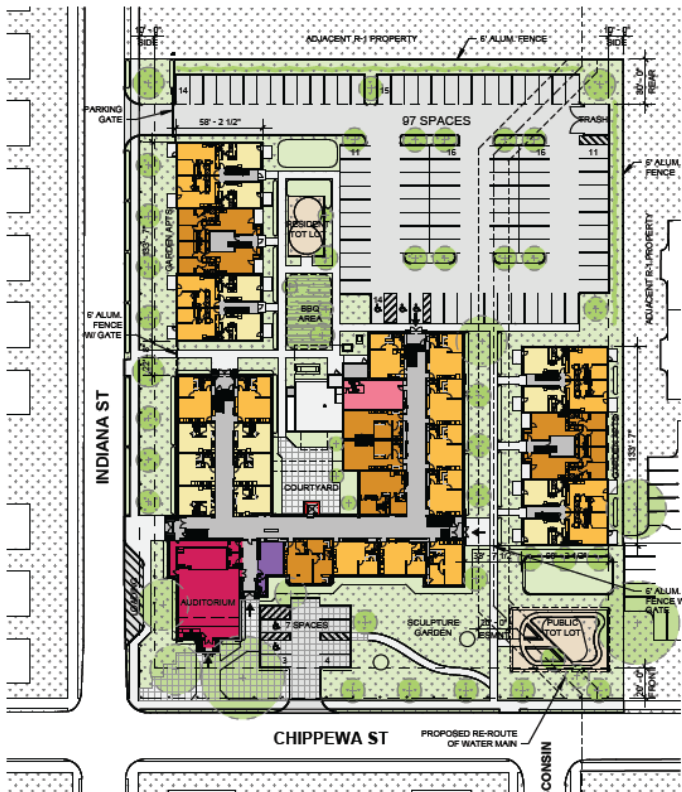
View of west-facing "front" entrance from Indiana Avenue. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.



View of east elevation (on vacated Wisconsin Street), nominally described as the "front" elevation in the HDAB Report. Diseased tree is in approximate location of new building footprint. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Per the submitted drawings, narrative, and presentation deck, the applicant is proposing to redevelop the former Higginbotham Elementary School into residences. The historic school building's exterior will be rehabilitated. Included in the project are two new construction buildings flanking the historic building to the east and northwest. Landscaping changes include incorporation of footpaths, parking areas, fencing, planting beds/trees, a sculpture garden, and a public tot lot. The images below and on next page are excerpted from the application materials, separately available to the Commission.



SITE PLAN KEY

STUDIO
 1 BEDROOM
 2 BEDROOM

BUILDING DATA

DATA	UNIT COUNT	GROSS SF	RENTABLE SF
SCHOOL	40	54,295 SF	27,580 SF
GARDEN APTS.	60	45,410 SF	38,540 SF
TOTAL	100	99,705 SF	66,120 SF

*SCHOOL GROSS AREA INCLUDES BASEMENT

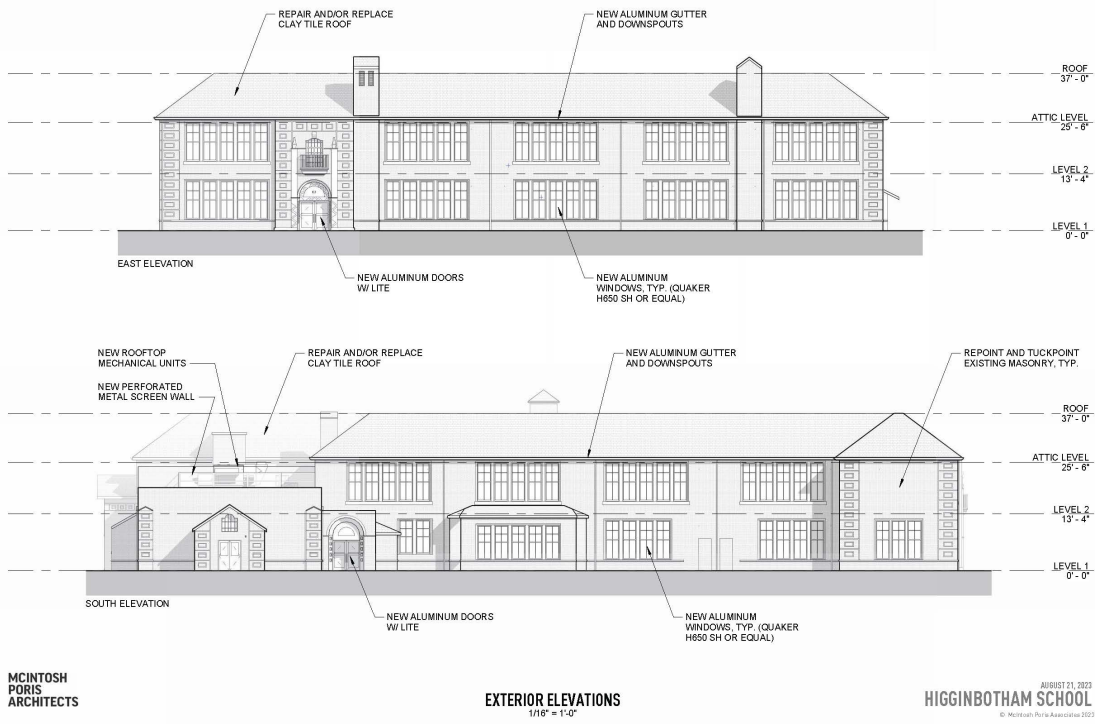
UNIT MIX	STUDIO	ONE BED	TWO BED/LOFT
SCHOOL	10	24	6
GARDEN APTS.	24	24	12
TOTAL	34	48	18

PARKING REQUIREMENTS

PARKING	DET. ZONING	MSHDA
SCHOOL	30 SPACES	80 SPACES
GARDEN APTS.	45 SPACES	120 SPACES
TOTAL PARKING REQUIRED:	75 SPACES	200 SPACES

REMAINING AUDITORIUM PARKING: 29 SPACES 0 SPACES

TOTAL PARKING PROVIDED: 104 SPACES + (1) 12'X35' LOADING



Proposed rehabilitation of historic building, above. Proposed elevation of new buildings, below.



STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The William E. Higginbotham School Historic District, and the adjacent Johnson Recreation Center and Joe Louis Playfield Historic District, were designated by City Council in tandem on March 5, 2021.
- This property was one of 39 city-owned properties included in the recent Planning Department’s Vacant School Properties study, led by the Office of Historic Preservation and completed in 2021.² This study included consulting architects and engineers experienced in the rehabilitation of historic buildings, and after inspection visits to all the properties, recommended potential adaptive reuse scenarios for the various sites, including possible redevelopment as housing. The Higginbotham School was rated as third highest in both condition and market potential out of these 39 properties.³
- The site proposal here at Higginbotham, including the erection of additional buildings/units to increase the development’s number and variety of units, is consistent with PDD’s preservation planning study. The new construction components, in this and other similar projects, make financing for the entire development feasible and thereby enables the historic rehabilitation of the original building.
- Staff finds that the Elements of Design for the Higginbotham School Historic district does offer the following (excerpted) relevant points:
 - **Element 1, Height:** *The William E. Higginbotham School Church [sic] is one story and two and one-half stories tall. A series of additions were constructed across the back of the building in 1928, 1944, and 1946.*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal is consistent with the height of the original building and represents another addition to the property, of which there are already three.
 - **Element 2, Proportion of buildings’ front facades:** *The six bay wide, east-facing front façade of the William E. Higginbotham School is wider than tall. The asymmetrical front façade of the building and its entrance occupies the second of six bays from the south end. The west façade along Indiana Street is also wider than tall with ten bays, the west façade is wider than that of the east-facing front façade.*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal maintains the proportions of the original building as part of the rehabilitation. The proportion of the new buildings are wider than tall, consistent with the historic prototype.
 - **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:** *The William E. Higginbotham School is composed of approximately 45 percent openings in its front façade. Most of the openings in the front (east) and west façades are covered with wood boards, although historic photographs and photos from calendar year 2015 show the original window proportions. All of the windows of the front (east) façade were of the wood double-hung sash variety with four-over-four window panes, resulting in individual window units that are almost two and one-half times taller than wide. They are arranged in groupings of five window units per opening sharing a common sill. One window in each classroom has been replaced by a modern anodized aluminum window to facilitate emergency egress. Random windows have been replaced or removed to accommodate air conditioning units. Above the main entry door on the front (east) façade is an arched multi-pane window. The entry doors are double wood doors with three vertical windows with square lights above.*
 - *The wood windows of the west façade are similar four-over-four windows at the northern side of the west façade. At the north side, a group of double four-over-four grouped windows flank each side of the groupings of five windows. At the south side of the west façade the windows are arranged in groupings of three per opening and sharing a common sill. In the southern-most bay of the west façade are smaller, fixed four-over-four windows arranged in groupings of three. At the projecting shed-roofed side-aisle at the west façade are two individual two-over-three window units. The off center, gabled entry bay on the (west) façade has an arched five-over-four narrow individual window unit centered over the entry door.*

2 <https://www.afterschooldetroit.com/>

3 <https://www.afterschooldetroit.com/schools/2-higginbotham>

- *The eastern bays at the south façade contain the same groupings of five window units composed of four-over-four double-hung wood windows at the first and second floors. Proportions of openings on the south façade are similar to those of the front façade. Above the auditorium entrance is an arched multi-pane window. The north façade has a large multi-pane window above the gymnasium entry door. The east side of the north façade has a tall window at the second story over the entry door at the north façade. Wide windows are on the western-facing side of the original building, although they are boarded and not visible at this time.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal seeks to replace the remaining historic windows/doors in the original building while maintaining the historic openings. The new buildings have compatible regular window openings. Additional discussion of the windows and doors is provided below.

- **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:** *The strong rhythm of solids to voids is created by the repetitive arrangements of windows on the front (east) façade. On the front façade, window arrangements are identical on the first and second stories, with the exception of the entrance bay, and, being separated by brick piers, create a regular progression of openings. The bell tower at the south side of the front façade has two louvered openings on each façade. The bell tower on the north side of the building has three louvered openings on the north and south sides of the bell tower. There are no openings in the basement level of the front (east) façade.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The solids to voids rhythm in the original building is preserved by the proposed rehabilitation; the new buildings have a compatible rhythm which does not compete with, and respects, the complexity and primacy of the historic building.

- **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets:** *Not applicable due to single building district.*

- **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections:** *The Wisconsin Street (east) entrance to the William E. Higginbotham School is located off-center, between the southernmost bay and the next bay to the north. It is approached from a concrete walkway that extends from the public sidewalk and extending to the concrete deck in front of the doorway. The Chippewa Street entrance is located at the western side of the façade. It is approached from a concrete walkway that extends from the public sidewalk and extending to the concrete deck in front of the doorway, and a concrete step that leads to the door. The Indiana Street entrance is located in the near-center of the west façade, between the auditorium and gymnasium. It is approached from a concrete walkway that extends from the public sidewalk and extending to the concrete step in front of the doorway. On the north façade, a slightly projecting one-story tall entryway is centered in the gymnasium wall. The entry way has a recessed double entry door. The gymnasium door is approached from a concrete walkway adjacent to the asphalt parking lot. There is an entry door at the east side of the north façade in the original school building. The entry way projects slightly from the façade and is approached from a concrete walkway at the north side of the building.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal preserves historic entrance features while sympathetically introducing new aluminum doors. The entrances for the new buildings occur in several locations and are conceptually consistent with the prototypes on the historic building in terms of recess and projection.



Rendering of historic building (left) with new building (right) from the applicant's materials. Note the conceptual similarity of several design elements (window rhythm, colors, textures, materials, height, entrances, balcony projections) that the modern building uses.

- **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** The steel-framed building is faced in beige brick with cast stone decorative details, limestone sills, and clay roof tiles. A wrought iron Juliette balcony railing is over the main entry door. Window surrounds and sashes are of wood. The rear addition at the west (Indiana Street) façade is brick and has cast stone surrounds, a string course, and limestone window sills.
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal preserves and restores historic material. The distinctive clay-tile roofing, according to the applicant, will be repaired or replaced with new clay tile. The new building incorporates modern materials, and modern analogs of the historic materials, which is appropriate under the Standards.
- **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** The major textural relationship is that of brick laid in running bond juxtaposed with decorative brick work and limestone and cast stone banding, medallions and reliefs. Decorative dark red brickwork frames entry doors, entry way upper levels, and piers on every façade. Repetition of piers separating groupings of windows adds considerably to textural interest.
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal preserves and restores historic textures on the original building. The new building uses several textures, including brick at the base and ribbed metal panel, to create textural interest and shadow lines befitting its contemporary design.



The newly proposed site buildings are of a strikingly contemporary design. However, stylistic conformity is never a requirement under NPS Standards and Guidelines, and can instead detract from truly historic buildings by creating sub-par facsimiles that fail to measure up to the hand-made quality of the historic context. The architect here has incorporated a range of textures, combinations of horizontal/vertical elements, and compatible colors (earthtones) that clearly reference the historic design elements of the original building.

- **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** The brick is beige-colored and contrasts with the gray color of the limestone and cast stone ornamentation. Dark red brick was used to create a contrasting color in the decorative brick work resembling quoins. Window frames and surrounds are painted dark red. The doors of the building have been painted bright red. The clay tile roofs on the western and southern half of the building are light-orange colored. The Spanish clay tile roof on the eastern side of the building is dark brown. Bright colors were painted on the door surrounds on the eastern and western façades during the period of 2000—2010. The original colors as determined by professional analysis are always acceptable for the building and may provide guidance for similar buildings.
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal preserves and restores historic colors on the original building. The colors on the new construction are directly imported from those on the historic prototype.
- **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** The most significant architectural detail of the Mediterranean Style building are its flat-centered, Spanish-clay tile hip roofs at various levels on each façade. Significant architectural details are on each off-center entrance bay on each façade. The pattern of stacked, quoin-like squares with outlines of reddish brown brick runs along the building's piers and top edges. This same running pattern lines the corners of the building as well. At the east façade entry, panels of cast-stone ornamentation extend from the flanking column capitals of the entrance, rising to the height of the second-story window, and are topped with miniature engaged obelisks. On the south façade's upper east corner, a cast stone cartouche features the lamp of knowledge, stars, fleur-de-lis, ceramic tile inserts, decorative scrolls, and classical motifs surround the cartouche. In general, the building's south and east façades have low relief architectural detail in brick and stone.
- **HDC Staff Comment:** Preservation and rehabilitation of the original building will retain the architectural details mentioned in the Elements of Design. The new building, built in a contemporary style, exhibits a similar pattern of detailing at several different scales, but with an appropriately modern vocabulary.

- **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** *The flat concrete slab-and-beam roof structure over the original north-south section of the building is not visible behind the hipped decorative tile roofs on various portions of the building. The roof shape over the front (east) façade is a low-pitch hipped roof with a flat center. The roof at the Chippewa Street (south) façade is a shed roof with a flat center. On the Indiana Street (west) façade, the roof over the west entry door at the one and one-half story tall entryway is gabled. There is a one story shed-roofed side-aisle on the west façade, south of the entry door that displays an orange Spanish clay tile roof. The roof of the Indiana Street (west) façade is flat on its southern side (over the auditorium) and hipped at the center, with a flat section to the north side over the gymnasium. The north façade, at the gymnasium section of the building, has a flat roof. There is a flat roof over the utility room (an addition) at the center of the north façade. The Spanish tile is regularly laid on the various roof sections.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposal preserves or replaces historic roofing materials in-kind, and preserves the roof geometry of the original building. The new building is flat-roofed and deferential to the historic context. Staff assesses that recreating a pitched or tiled roof on the new buildings will substantially detract from the primacy of the historic core building.
- **Element 12, Walls of continuity:** *Not applicable due to single building district.*
- **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** *The building is set back from the former (now vacated) Wisconsin Street, Chippewa Street, and Indiana Street with a slightly graded, flat, grassy lawn containing several large maple and honey locust trees. Overgrown shrubs line the west, south, and east elevations at the building's base. A flagpole is centered on the south lawn of the building at Chippewa Street. No other significant lighting fixtures or street furniture exist.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** At least one mature tree will be removed to construct the new buildings. However, substantial new landscaping, including garden beds, trees, shrubs, and fencing will be incorporated into the site. Badly overgrown shrubs, weed trees, and dying areas of lawn will be removed or remedied. New pavement and fencing is added in creative ways that add utility and security, but not in an overbearing way. Staff does not assess that the current open space around the school is a distinctive character-defining feature. The lawns, parking lots, and playgrounds around Detroit's school buildings are principally utilitarian in design, almost without exception, and merely "take up" the rest of the available parcel and were not necessarily designed to be part of a formal architectural composition with the school building itself. As such, erecting new buildings in these surrounding areas, and sensitively incorporating new landscape features, parking lots, and fencing to accommodate adaptive reuse, should not be found inappropriate.
- **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures:** *Open space is created by the siting of the building on a corner lot and its setback from Chippewa and Indiana Streets. Open space exists in the broad, grassy lawn and mature landscaping surrounding the building. To the east of the building is a paved surface parking lot and the Johnson Recreation Center (8550 Chippewa). To the north of the building is an asphalt surface parking lot followed by the grassy open playfield of Higginbotham School. To the northeast of the building is the Joe Louis Playfield, a City-owned recreation field with baseball diamonds, a basketball court, and playground equipment. On the surrounding streets of Norwalk, Chippewa, and Indiana are residential structures with similar front setbacks and front lawns.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** Per the previous staff comment at Element 13, while open space exists in juxtaposition to the original building (and its several additions) we do not find that the open space is necessarily character-defining for historic purposes, nor that adding the new buildings will negatively affect the historic character of the site or original building.
- **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** *William E. Higginbotham School is a moderately-scaled institutional building that has mostly small-scaled detail on its front (east),*

south, north, and west façades. Architectural elements such as piers and window units are appropriately scaled.

- **HDC Staff Comment:** Important historic detail and elements on the historic building will be preserved and perpetuated in the proposed rehabilitation. The proposed new windows are appropriately subdivided to match the historic prototypes. The new construction, through the choice of windows, façade materials, and design elements appropriate to its modern character, also incorporates scalar range.
- **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevations:** *The front elevation of the William E. Higginbotham School is horizontal in directional expression, but balanced by the height of the hipped roofs, the piers on each side of the main entry door, and the vertically-expressed bell towers.*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** A key feature of the historic building is the seeming absence of a unique front entrance, and by extension, a corresponding front elevation. There are existing historic entryways on the west, south, and east sides that could all (and may have at various times) serve as a “main” entrance. The building is addressed on Wisconsin, at the east side, which is now a vacated street. Architecturally grand entrances exist on both Chippewa Street (to the south), and Indiana Street (to the west). The building as a result does not, in staff’s opinion, have a convincing “front elevation,” suggesting that all of the facades (east, south, west) are important and character-defining, and should be given similar weight. The new building skillfully adopts the horizontal block character of the historic facades, and wisely resists the urge to create a new directional expression or dominant front entrance. The proposal manages to add two additional buildings to the site without disturbing or altering the multi-directional expression of the historic core.



View of south-facing “front” entrance facing Chippewa Avenue (from Google Street View, September 2009). This view is now overgrown. The auditorium block, which has its own Chippewa-facing entrance, is cut off at the extreme left of this image.

- **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** *Not applicable due to single building district. The Chippewa Street setback of the building roughly corresponds to the setback of the Johnson Recreation Center built in 1977 (8550 Chippewa Street).*
- **HDC Staff Comment:** The setback of the new buildings respect the setback of the original

historic core. The setback of the northwest building aligns with the historic precedent along Indiana. At Chippewa, the new building to the east defers and sets back slightly further from the historic building to preserve a visual corridor to the historic Wisconsin Street entrance. See site plans/renderings.

- **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** *The footprint of the William E. Higginbotham School occupies approximately 40 percent of its parcel.*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** The additional buildings, when complete, will cover a larger percentage of the parcel. A large amount of open space will remain in the immediate context, in the form of the Joe Louis Playfield and the grounds of the Johnson Recreation Center.

 - **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** *The front (east) façade is straightforward in massing, orderly in its placement of detailing, and regular in its window placement, resulting in a fair degree of complexity over all. A fair degree of complexity is found in the building's brickwork details surrounding the front entry door and at the corner piers.*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** The original building will be rehabilitated and its existing complexity preserved. The new construction exhibits a medium-degree of complexity appropriate for contemporary new construction.

 - **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** *The William E. Higginbotham School is oriented toward the former Wisconsin Street, a vacated north-south street. The vista to the north and east of the building is comprised of flat grassy fields, as well as the mature trees of the landscape to the south and east. The general overview is of a high-density, one and one-half and two story, residential neighborhood of single-family houses.*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** While the addition of new buildings will necessarily close off some views of the site and context, staff assesses that important and character-defining historical views, principally along the southwest corner of Indiana and Chippewa, the view to the Chippewa side, and the view of the original front entrance along Wisconsin, are all preserved and enhanced by the proposed project.

 - **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** *The appearance of the front façade of William E. Higginbotham School is asymmetrical, due to the south-of-center positioning of the entrance bay and bell towers. The south and west façades are also asymmetrical due to the additions of the auditorium and gymnasium spaces, and the removal of a conservatory on the south façade. The north façade is asymmetrical and has a large smokestack at the center with utility rooms to its east and south; an entry to the gymnasium is on the west side of the north façade.*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** The asymmetrical, balanced composition of the original historic building and its additions are preserved. The new buildings are directly related with, and complementary to, the non-directional character of the historic core.

 - **Element 22, General environmental character:** *The William E. Higginbotham School Historic District consists of an architecturally and historically significant institutional building situated at the northeast corner of Chippewa Street and Indiana Street in the Eight Mile Road-Wyoming Neighborhood. The building sits on the southwest corner of a park-like area containing grass fields, sports fields, parking lots, and mature trees. The building and the surrounding fields and Johnson Recreation Center sit centered among an early 20th Century previously established residential neighborhood extending south from Eight Mile Road, west to Monte Vista Street, south to Pembroke Street and east to Woodingham Drive. The surrounding area consists of single-family homes in a high-density residential neighborhood..*
 - **HDC Staff Comment:** The proposed project adds density in a sensitive and thoughtful way, while preserving the important character of the building, site, and context.
- Staff assesses that the proposed new buildings and rehabilitation of the property, as described and

analyzed above, substantially conforms to the Elements of Design established for this district.

- The applicant, in their materials, provided a very thorough report and analysis of the state of the existing historic windows. A photograph of every window in the property (both inside and outside), was provided to staff; this very large file is available to Commissioners upon request. Staff assesses that the problems outlined by the applicant in retention of the existing historic windows (where they remain), particularly the difficulty and feasibility of working with mullied windows containing some replacement and some deteriorated original windows, suggest that window replacement with an appropriately designed modern window is reasonable and feasible under the Standards and Guidelines. Staff further assesses that the proposed Quaker H650 SH aluminum window product (with simulated divided lites) is appropriate and should be approved by the Commission. The cumulative effect of this ambitious rehabilitation, in staff's opinion, firmly validates the choice to incorporate new windows of appropriate design, as a reasonable and feasible treatment for a long-abandoned and vandalized building.
- When historic preservation staff visited the property as part of the Vacant School Properties planning study in 2020, we observed historic wooden exterior doors in several locations. It is unclear if these doors remain or are deteriorated or otherwise incompatible with the proposed adaptive reuse. In general, staff supports the installation of the new doors as proposed, anticipating that with multiple trespass events the historic doors may neither be desirable or functionally repairable.
- Staff notes also the addition of a small parking lot at the Chippewa side, nominally a "front" elevation as discussed above, to accommodate community and public use of the auditorium block, and to provide accessible parking. The lot is woven into a landscape which commendably resists the incompatible use of a perimeter fence while accommodating a beneficial adaptive reuse. Staff assesses that this parking lot, directly supporting and integral with the historic rehabilitation of a building with multiple "fronts", should be found appropriate under the NPS standard of cumulative effect, which states:

Each property exhibits a unique set of conditions; thus, the evaluation of any single aspect of the proposed work can only be made in the context of those conditions and all the other work that constitutes the project. In some cases, a single aspect of a project may not be consistent with recommendations found in the Guidelines, yet its impact on the character of the property as a whole is small enough that the overall project meets the Standards.⁴

ISSUES

- It is staff's opinion that the proposed rehabilitation and new construction retains the historic character of the property and district, is aligned with the district's Elements of Design, and protects and preserves the integrity of the property and the surrounding district.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-73, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the William E. Higginbotham School Historic District's Elements of Design.

⁴ <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/cumulative-effect-and-historic-character.htm>