

**STAFF REPORT: 6/14/2023 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: J. ROSS**

**ADDRESS: 1 PARK AVENUE**

**APPLICATION NO: #23-8390**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: DAVID WHITNEY BUILDING**

**APPLICANT/OWNER: DAVID DIRITA/ROXBURY GROUP**

**ARCHITECT: HEATHER MCKEON (INFUZ DESIGN)**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 5/30/2023**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 5/23/2023**

## **SCOPE**

**INSTALL AWNINGS, CANOPIES, AND PERGOLAS; ESTABLISH OUTDOOR PATIOS;  
REPLACE STOREFRONTS (INCLUDING AT DESIGNATED INTERIOR)**

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**



**1 Park Avenue, current appearance, staff photo**

Per the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board:

The David Whitney Building is an eighteen-story office building located on Park

Avenue between Washington Boulevard and Woodward Avenue. Roughly pentagonal in plan, it conforms to the shape of its site, which is a result of its location at the major radius center of Judge Woodward's 1807 Detroit street plan - Grand Circus Park. Because of this, it has three major elevations, each with an individual entrance. Consequently, the building in its presence radiates from the park, as does the street plan. Its main (north) facade is physically attached to the steel and glass Grand Circus Park People Mover Station platform at mezzanine level. The broad concrete and brick sidewalk in front is obstructed by the large concrete pillars supporting the track.

The David Whitney Building is constructed of steel resting on caisson foundations extending down to bedrock. Originally designed to reflect a decorative base, a tall shaft and a decorated top, the exterior of the building was significantly altered in 1959 to create a more modern appearance. Its first story was originally sheathed in light stone but has been resurfaced with dark granite panels. Above the first floor the exterior is sheathed in white glazed brick. Terra cotta ornamentation expressing the Italian Renaissance style once graced the fifth floor, the fifteen through eighteenth floors, and the cornice line; it was all removed in 1959. The Park (north) facade is five bays wide while the side elevations of the building are seven bays wide.

Fenestration is similar on the three prominent elevations of the David Whitney Building and is set deeply within the surface of the wall. Floors two through four still contain their original decorative apron panels and window surrounds, although granite strips were added around each of the three-story window bays. Their Chicago-style arrangements - a single opening containing a central window flanked on each side by a narrower window - are divided by pilasters rising up through the parapet. Within each opening, the center fixed pane window unit is framed with a Greek fret pattern on the faces of its surround, dividing it from the outer, double-hung sash, narrower windows. Ornamental apron panels divide floors two through four horizontally, the panels framed by a running Greek fret; these panels have a recessed panel with surrounded by an egg-and-dart pattern within.

Floors six through fourteen are in their original condition. Each bay is divided in two by a brick pilaster rising up through the parapet, and each half of the divided bay contains one double-hung sash window, beneath which is a recessed brick decorative apron. Originally on the fifteenth floor, separating each pair of windows, was a cartouche. Floors sixteen through eighteen, the upper floors, have been altered to

remove any semblance of the original groupings of windows. Instead, narrow pilasters extend from the floors below through the parapet.

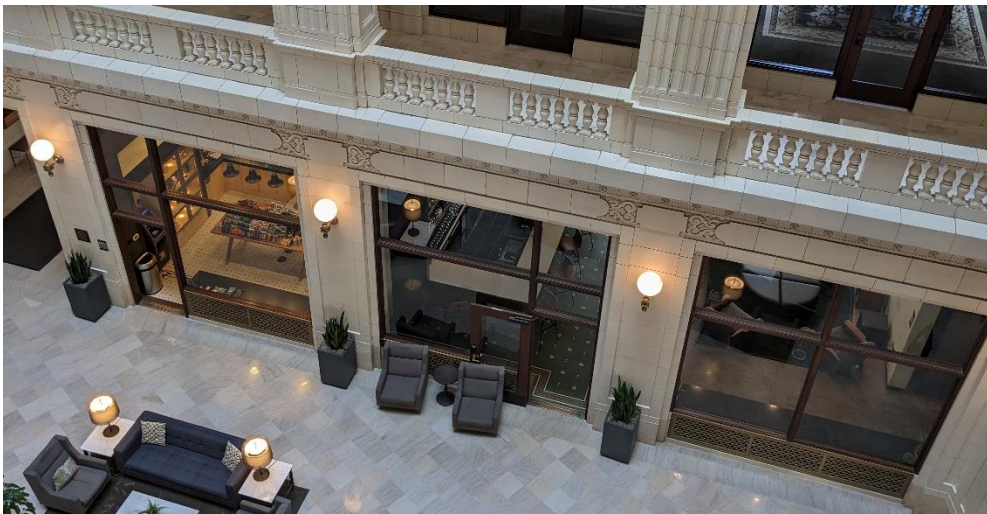
Both the interior and exterior of the David Whitney Building were designed to maximize the beneficial effects of natural light. Originally sheathed in light stone, white glazed brick, and white terra cotta, the exterior of the building was a preface to the white enameled brick and glazed terra cotta surfaces reflecting natural light within.

Entrances from Park Avenue, Washington Boulevard and Woodward Avenue lead to a central atrium lobby or rotunda which rises seventy-one feet, or four stories, above the entrance level to a glass skylight. The atrium lobby is surrounded by arcaded corridors leading to shops on the sides and elevators in the rear which line the perimeter of the building. The atrium lobby is faced with white glazed terracotta. There is a balustrade at the second level of the arcade and pilasters rising from the second level through the third level. The pilasters are capped with an entablature

which is surmounted by semi-circular arched openings at the fourth level. Ornate terracotta medallions decorate the spandrel area; each arch contains a key console. The third level -contains dark-colored terracotta spandrel panels visually supported on decorative consoles. The south wall of the atrium contains the seven elevators, each with ornate brass doors and decorative terra cotta work surrounding the doors at each floor level. The interior of the lobby has not been altered, except for some alterations to individual storefronts.

The upper fourteen stories contain offices surrounding the open light court above the atrium skylight. This center light court of over 3,000 square feet in area is open to the sky at the top. Italian marble was used to line the corridor floors and walls throughout; corridor doors and frames were mahogany.

The building's first story exterior includes non-historic aluminum storefronts. The first story entrance at the building's north elevation is sheltered by a recently installed, internally lit-brightly colored canopy which has been affixed to the people mover platform that is directly to the north of the building. Finally, note that the interior atrium lobby includes four mahogany storefronts that are included in this applicaiton, each of which displays a brass grille base. Per project construction drawings, these storefronts were refurbished using in kind materials during the building's recent rehabilitation.



**West bank of storefronts within the interior atrium which are proposed for modification, current appearance.  
Photo taken by staff**



**East bank of storefronts within the interior atrium which are proposed for modification, current appearance.  
Photo taken by staff**

## **PROPOSAL**

With the current proposal the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to undertake the following work items per the submitted drawings and narrative:

### **Interior**

- Within the first-floor atrium space, modify four (4) existing storefronts to include the following:
  - Retain the northeastern storefront, but erect a wood wall behind/to the east of it within the new restaurant space. Note that the interior designation does not include the new restaurant space within which the new wood wall be erected.
  - At the southeastern storefront, remove a door to create a fixed storefront
  - At the northwestern storefront, remove a door to and widen to create a new passageway
  - At central western storefront, remove a door and side panel to widen to create a new open passageway

### **Exterior**

- North/Park Avenue elevation
  - Replace face at the extant, non-historic lightbox which is affixed to the people mover platform and remove "Aloft" signage.
  - Install a new canopy at this elevation, the design of which was modeled after original doorway details.
  - Retail Storefronts to feature Sunbrella fabric awnings. The awnings will be installed within the existing window fenestration opening and will be aligned with existing window transoms.
  - Install a new bronze-colored ventilation louver, the design of which is consistent with existing louvers at ground floor. The color and material will match the existing storefront system. Also, the lover will be sized within existing transom opening.
- East/Woodward Avenue elevation
  - Remove the non-historic "Aloft" branded signage
  - Install two new canopies, the design of which has been modeled after original doorway details.
  - Retail Storefronts to feature Sunbrella fabric awnings. The awnings will be installed within the existing window fenestration opening and will be aligned with existing window transoms.
  - Atop the new northernmost canopy, install standup letter signage. The sign will be illuminated by linear LED strip on the canopy top.
  - Install a new bronze-colored ventilation louver, the design of which is consistent with existing louvers at ground floor. The color and material will match the existing storefront system. Also, the lover will be sized within existing transom opening.
  - Establish an outdoor patio space in the sidewalk area to include painted millwork planter boxes at perimeter. Planters to feature evergreen plantings.
- West/Washington Boulevard elevation
  - At each of the two existing outdoor patio areas replace the existing perimeter railing with millwork planters. The new planters will feature evergreen plantings and the current patio size will be reduced by one bay. A freestanding bronze-colored, open metal pergola system will be erected to shelter each of the patios. The pergolas will rise to height of the existing door transom and the columns will align with building column line to reveal windows behind system. Also, the pergolas will sit off building façade a minimum of six inches.

- Install one new canopy, the design of which has been modeled after historic doorway details.
- South/rear elevation
  - Install new platform and mechanical units at the rear elevation, which in the alley

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The David Whitney Building historic district was designated in 2000 and includes an interior designation. Per the ordinance for the district, the following interior spaces are covered by the designation:

The interior spaces of the David Whitney Building which are hereby made subject to the Historic District Commission's consideration are those spaces normally accessible to the public from the main entrance doors on Washington Boulevard, Woodward Avenue, and Park Avenue, including the four-story high lobby, sometimes called an atrium and referred to at the time of construction as a "central light court," and its adjoining spaces including the one-story-high entrance areas or hallways which lead from the lobby to the main entrance doors and the balcony areas of the upper three floors of the lobby. Features within these areas subject to the Historic District Commission's consideration include, but are not limited to, wall surfaces, including the store fronts facing the lobby on all four floors, ceilings, including the glazed skylight covering the lobby, floor surfaces, and permanent fixtures including light fixtures. Areas which are not made subject to the Historic District Commission's consideration include the interior of stores and offices adjoining the lobby and all other areas within the David Whitney Building, including basements, the upper floors from the fifth floor to the roof, attic areas, and the interiors of closets and service areas.

Therefore, the work proposed at the four interior/atrium storefronts are subject to the Commission's review purview

- Note that the design of the canopies proposed for the north, east, and west elevation was based upon historic precedent. The canopies will be installed within the fenestration openings and will not result in the removal of historic signage. It is staff's opinion that this work meets the Standards
- It is staff's opinion that the work proposed at the existing lightbox sign which is attached to the People Mover track, to the north of the building will result in an appearance that is compatible with the building's historic character.
- The two new pergolas that are proposed for erection at the west elevation will not be attached to the building. They will be located at areas in which outdoor patios have previously been established and they are open/will not be enclosed in any way. The scale of the pergolas in relation to the building and the commercial nature of the building's surrounds further serve to mitigate the impact of the new structures. It is staff's opinion that the pergolas meet the Standards
- The new platform and mechanical equipment will be located at the rear elevation, in a vacated alley, behind a high gate, where a number of mechanical units/equipment is located. The equipment will be minimally visible from the public right-of-way and its proposed location is logical and appropriate, in staff's opinion.



1. **Proposed location of new mechanical platform and equipment (in the alley, behind the existing gates)**

- As noted previously, the four storefronts in the interior atrium at the first story are covered by the building’s interior designation. The applicant is seeking to modify the elements and configuration of three of these storefronts. Specifically, the proposal will result in the removal of existing material at the following locations:
  - At the southeastern storefront, remove a door to create a fixed storefront. This will result in the removal of existing mahogany storefront and a non-historic door. It will also alter the current lite configuration and include the addition of new metal grille panel
  - At the northwestern storefront, remove a door to and widen to create a new passageway. This will result in the removal of existing mahogany storefront and a non-historic door. It will also alter the current lite configuration and include the removal of a portion of the existing metal grille panel
  - At central western storefront, remove a door and side panel to widen to create a new open passageway. It will also alter the current lite configuration and include the removal of a portion of the existing metal grille panel

A review of the construction drawings from the 2013 rehabilitation (see the attached) provides notes that indicate that the **typical** conditions at these storefront merit a “refurbishing” of the “historic wood storefront systems” to include the repair of the metal grille panels and the installation of new glass within the units. Staff did visit the site in an effort to ascertain the amount of historic material that remains at the subject storefronts, but found it difficult to determine the original versus new fabric. The applicant has therefore submitted a narrative which indicates that “the wood frames at the storefronts were deteriorated and missing and for the most part were re-created in the 2012-13 restoration of the building.” The applicant has also noted that the storefronts were routinely changed over time, as businesses moved in and out of the atrium’s commercial spaces. This is evidenced by the inconsistent appearance of first floor storefronts at the time of the 2012-2013 restoration, some of which had been altered to accommodate a mezzanine space (see the applicant’s attached document entitled “Interior - Additional Information”). Re: the first story storefronts, as the original fabric is largely not intact, the inconsistent configuration of the storefronts at the time of the district’s designation, and the plan for all replacement material to match the original in material and design, it is staff’s opinion that the proposed modifications are not demonstrably inappropriate.

## ISSUES

- None

## RECOMMENDATION

### **Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Denial**

It is staff’s opinion that the proposed work items meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and conform to the district’s elements of design. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed.

