

STAFF REPORT: DECEMBER 13, 2023, REGULAR MEETING
Revised December 12, 2023, to include additional information on finishes

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2023-00133

ADDRESS: 7810 KERCHEVAL (ALSO KNOWN AS 1826 SEYBURN)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE

APPLICANT/OWNER: JAMIE MERTZ, HOLCOMB DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: NOVEMBER 20, 2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: NOVEMBER 30, 2023 AND DECEMBER 7, 2023

SCOPE: ERECT ADDITION CONNECTING DWELLING AND COMMERCIAL BUILDING, REMOVE REAR PORCH AND STAIRWAY ENCLOSURE, RESTORE FRONT PORCH, ALTER DORMERS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The property at 7810 Kercheval consists of two buildings on a shared parcel.



November 2023 photo by staff.



November 2023 photo by staff.

Built in 1913, the house faces east onto Seyburn. It is a two-and-one-half-story brick house, likely Free Classic or eclectic in style, though details particular to a specific architectural style are largely not present. Noteworthy features include an engaged tower at the northwest corner, with curved sash windows and a conical roof, as well as an angled, single-story bay at the northeast corner. A front porch with a wide, simplified Classical entablature has been enclosed, likely sometime in the mid-twentieth century. A rear porch has also been enclosed. The building is topped by a hip roof with three dormers.

A flat-roof, two-bay commercial building sits to the east of the house and faces north onto Kercheval. It was likely built in 1917, but possibly in 1924 (building permit dates conflict). Decorative features include coursed brickwork and lozenge medallions in limestone or cast stone. The configuration of the building was altered in 1965 when one storefront was converted to a garage.



Site plan from Detroit Parcel Viewer.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes a comprehensive rehabilitation for both buildings with multiple scope items, including the addition of a single-story, connecting “hyphen” joining the two buildings.



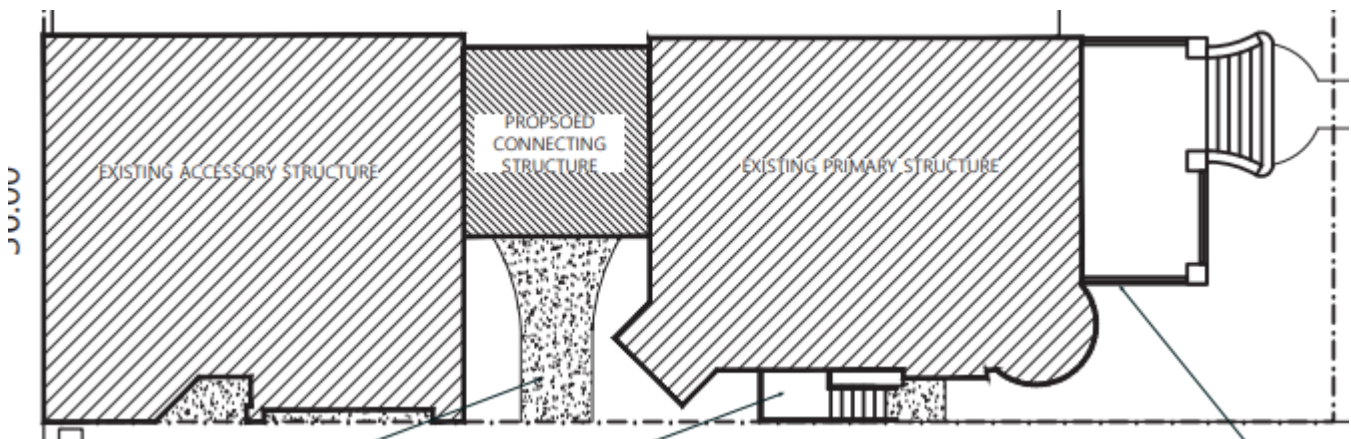
Rendering of proposed work viewed from Kercheval. Image from application documents.



Rendering of proposed work viewed from Seyburn. Image from application documents.

Addition

A single-story addition is proposed to connect the two historic buildings. The addition would be clad in metal composite material (MCM) panels **in matte black** and feature a Tubelite proprietary aluminum storefront system. The storefront would include a single door at its west end, serving as a primary entrance to the combined building.



Site plan showing connecting addition. Image from application documents, cropped by staff.

Removal of enclosed rear porch area

The addition would require the demolition of a historic rear utility porch and stairway enclosure.



Enclosed area proposed for removal. Image from application documents.

Alterations to dormers

One new dormer is proposed to be added to the rear (east) of the house; an existing dormer on the south side of the house is proposed to be enlarged.



Rendering of altered (left of image, south face of building) and new (right of image, east face of building) dormers. Image from application documents.

New storefronts

The existing storefront on the east bay of the garage building is proposed for replacement, also with a Tubelite aluminum storefront system. The new storefront would include vertical and horizontal elements largely matching the placement and configuration of the existing storefront. The 1965 garage opening on the west bay would be replaced with a storefront system similar to that on the east bay.

Window and door repair and restoration (historic transom to be removed)

All historic windows and doors on both buildings are intended to be repaired and restored, with the exception of a historic wood transom window on the commercial building that is proposed for replacement. In a few instances, new windows or doors would be installed where historic windows or doors are missing. The front (west-facing)

door of the house is specified to be a TruStile brand, glazed, floating-panel wood door. The other doors and windows are not specified.

Front (west-facing) porch and side (north-facing) entrance

The front porch is proposed for a restoration that would include the removal of framing, wood panels, and windows that presently enclose the porch. A curved, metal balustrade is proposed to be removed. A horizontal, wood railing would be installed.

Asphalt shingle roof

The replacement of the existing asphalt shingle roof is proposed. The new shingles would be CertainTeed Landmark shingles in Weathered Wood color.



Proposed shingles. Image from application documents.

Additional scope items

Other, relatively minor scope items are described in the application scope of work and depicted in construction drawings. These include repointing of brick, removal of a non-historic advertising sign from the east elevation, in-kind replacement of damaged coping, fascia, and soffits in limited areas, and other minor items.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The West Village Historic District was established by Ordinance 547-H in 1983. The Final Report for the district states that it is “of historical importance as a benchmark to the growth of Detroit in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” implying a Period of Significance.
- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-132) note:
 - “The district contains a great variety of sizes, shapes, and arrangements of openings.”
 - “Garages are typically alley-facing and located at the rear of the lot.”
 - “Voids are usually spaced evenly within the façades, resulting in balanced compositions.”
 - “Doors and shutters feature an array of colors, usually harmonizing with the main body of the house.”
 - “The district is characterized by a diversity of roof shapes. Hipped or pitched roofs on most residential buildings are punctuated with gables and dormers, with the exception of the Victorian cottages, with their steeply pitched roofs, and apartment buildings, whose roofs are not visible from the street. Roofs of commercial buildings generally appear flat. Porch roofs vary greatly according to style.”
 - “The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings, with their generally uniform setbacks within block faces. New buildings should conform to these setbacks where they exist.”
 - “Commercial buildings on Kercheval form a horizontal row.”
 - “The varying designs of the buildings, frequently with slight setbacks or projections in their

façades, cause the buildings to relate to the front setback line in different ways; this creates a slight variation in the setback line.”

- “The West Village District is characterized by residential and minor commercial development dating from 1880 through 1930. Long, straight streets, a significant array of housing types, and a cohesiveness achieved through uniform setbacks and heights result in an urban, medium density neighborhood. . . . West Village is of an urban character, rare in the City, because of the diversity of building types in the area.”

Addition

- The massing, height, fenestration pattern, and material of the proposed addition render it compatible with the adjoining historic buildings. Its dark color and recessed placement cause it to visually recede to avoid distracting from the historic buildings. While an entrance is located on the addition, its location behind a projecting bay of the historic house helps to deemphasize its prominence. These qualities satisfy Standard #9: “The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.”
- *New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings: Preservation Concerns* (Preservation Brief 14) elaborates upon the requirements of Standard #9. Suggested design approaches including “incorporate a simple, recessed, small-scale hyphen” and “avoid designs that unify the two volumes into a single architectural whole” are effectively incorporated in the design of the proposed addition.
- The addition will also serve the added purposes of providing an accessible entrance (a wheelchair lift is located within) and screening mechanical equipment, which would otherwise be challenging to accommodate without disrupting the character of the house.



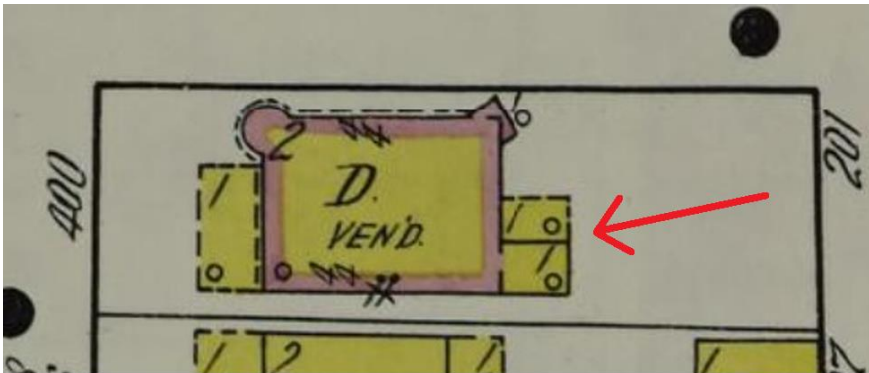
Removal of enclosed rear porch area

- The addition will require the removal of a rear (east-facing) projection from the house. In plan, this projection consists of two distinct elements. The north half (closest to Kercheval) of the projecting area is a true porch, likely to have originally been of a similar brick and wood composition as the front porch, but enclosed at some point in the building’s early history. The south half (furthest from Kercheval) is a stair enclosure connecting a rear door on the building’s first floor with a bulkhead door accessing the basement. Together, these areas are enclosed with the same beadboard cladding, suggesting the alterations were

performed at the same time.



Left: North (street-facing) side of enclosure. Right: South side of enclosure. Images from application materials.



Rear porch and stair enclosure (denoted by arrow) visible in of plan view. (Note that the commercial building has not yet been built.) Sanborn Map Company, 1915.

- In general, porches are character-defining features; their removal is contrary to the Standards. In this case, however, the character of the porch has already been diminished by dramatic alterations; further, the historical relationship between the porch and the former backyard has already been eliminated by the construction of the 1917 commercial building.
- As the house has two-street facing facades, the south elevation closely abuts an adjacent building, and the rear of the house features a distinctive and character-defining angled box bay window, the rear porch enclosure is the only remaining location where an addition could be feasibly accommodated.
- Staff opinion is that the proposed demolition is appropriate in that it facilitates the rehabilitation and continued use of the building while minimizing the impact on character-defining features.
- *Making Historic Properties Accessible* (Preservation Brief 32) further supports this analysis:

Secondary spaces and finishes and features that may be less important to the historic character

should also be identified; these may generally be altered without jeopardizing the historical significance of a property. Non-significant spaces, secondary pathways, later additions, previously altered areas, utilitarian spaces, and service areas can usually be modified without threatening or destroying a property's historical significance.

Alterations to dormers

- The south-facing dormer, proposed to be enlarged, is in a location that is not readily visible from the street as it is obscured by an adjacent building. The enlarged dormer would retain the same hip-roof, paired-window configuration. Staff opinion is that the proposed alteration does not substantially change the character of the roofline or the building as a whole.
- The proposed new dormer, on the east side of the roof, is located on a non-primary elevation and would not destroy or obscure any character-defining features of the property.



Left: South-facing dormer. November 2023 photo by staff. Right: East-facing plane of roof. Photo from application materials.

Front (west-facing) porch and side (north-facing) entrance

- Based on materials and architectural style, the front porch appears to have enclosed in the mid-twentieth century. The existing curved railing also appears to have been added at that time. The removal of the enclosure and railing would undo non-historic work and restore the porch to its historic appearance. A proposed, new wood railing is of appropriate materials, dimensions, and height to be compatible with the building.
- A small, side porch on the north elevation is entirely missing, leaving behind an area of exposed, common brick indicating the former configuration of the missing porch. The proposed work replicates the missing stairway with appropriate and compatible materials.



Left: Existing conditions. Photo by staff. Right: Rendering of proposed work. Image from application.

New storefronts

- The existing storefront consists of aluminum windows and a steel door on the east bay, and a steel garage door set within brick infill on the west bay, all of which appear to date, or are known to date, from the late-twentieth century and are not historic. Their replacement with compatible materials is appropriate.

Window and door repair and restoration (historic transom to be removed)

- Most historic window and door openings on both buildings are proposed for restoration, including sashes, trim, sills, and casing.
- One exception is the proposed removal of a historic, wood transom window from the east storefront bay. The wood frame components of the transom are visibly split, deformed, and otherwise deteriorated to the extent that staff is convinced the transom is beyond feasible repair.



Historic transom window. December 2023 photo by staff.

- The proposed aluminum transom closely matches the thickness, profile, and pattern of the historic transom.
- A hand-painted sign, painted directly on the transom glass, provides visual interest to the façade, but it is unlikely to be a historic feature as transoms were historically intended to provide illumination to the

interior, rather than being painted. It is more likely that the paint was added in the mid-twentieth century, after the close of the Period of Significance.



Non-historic doors to be replaced. Leftmost image from application materials, other images from December 2023 staff site visit.

Several non-historic doors are proposed for replacement. Other than the front (Seyburn-facing) door of the house, replacements are not specified.

ISSUES

- Some non-historic windows and doors are proposed for replacement. Although the replacement of these elements is acceptable, specifications for the new units are not provided. New windows and doors must be compatible with the property and its environment. The National Park Service guidance “Replacement Windows that Meet the Standards” applies here. In most cases, a one-over-one wood sash window would be appropriate; replacement windows need not exactly match the historic windows presently or formerly on the property.
- ~~Although a submitted product brochure for the proposed MCM panels shows several options for colors and finish, a selection is not specified.~~
- Renderings of the proposed work show a monochromatic grey **or white** color scheme for wood elements. Color System B and Color System C, both appropriate for the house specifically, describe the importance of contrasting color schemes.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a *Certificate of Appropriateness* for the proposed work as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, with the following conditions:

- Replacements for non-historic windows and doors are subject to approval by staff (historic windows and doors may not be replaced).
- ~~The color and finish for the proposed MCM panels are subject to approval by staff.~~

- A color scheme for the house shall be guided by Color System B, Color System C, or another appropriate color scheme approved by staff.