

**STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 7, 2024 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: A. DYE**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00064**

**ADDRESS: 640 W. WILLIS, AKA "WEST WILL"**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN LOCAL**

**APPLICANT: JOHN BIGGAR, STUDIOZONE LLC**

**PROPERTY OWNER: 640 W WILLIS HOLDINGS**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: FEBRUARY 19, 2024**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 21, 2024**

**SCOPE: REPLACE WINDOWS**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The three-bay wide, four and one-half story tall masonry-clad building is located on the north side of Willis, between Second and Third. Dark reddish-brown vertical finish brick was used on the front elevation and the side walls closest to Willis. The brick was laid in many patterns to accentuate the massing and window placement, and the bays are topped with cast stone balustrades. A two-story tall entrance faced with stone that was carved to include four fluted Tuscan pilasters and the name "West Will". The remaining side and rear walls of the building are faced with standard brown brick.

Single window openings, with symmetrical placement, dominate the front elevation. The side and rear elevations have single and grouped window openings. Wood double-hung window sash on the front have a six-over-one pattern and tall, narrow steel fixed units remain on either side of the front entrance. The sides and rear window openings have beige one-over-one vinyl windows. Wood brickmould remains within the window openings.



*Staff photos, February 21, 2024*



**PROPOSAL**

The applicant’s narrative states that all the windows on the building will be replaced.

Front:

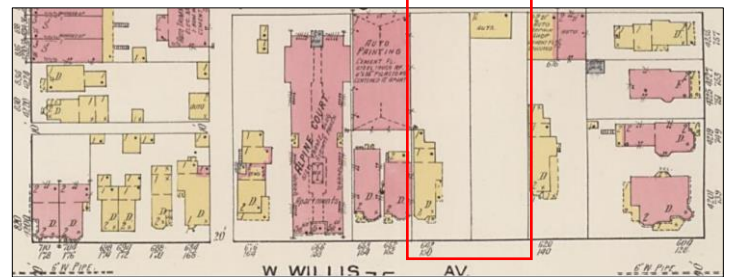
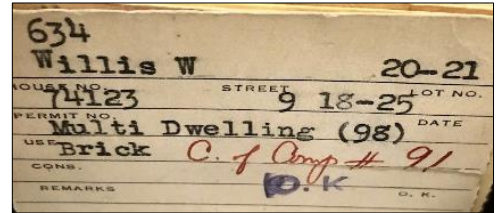
- Replace “all windows and frame”
- Existing wood double-hung units with six-over-one pattern will be replaced with new wood windows.
- Install Weathershield premium aluminum-clad wood double-hung windows, color: TBD.

Sides and Rear:

- Replace “all windows and frame”.
- Install single-hung Vinylmax windows, color: white.

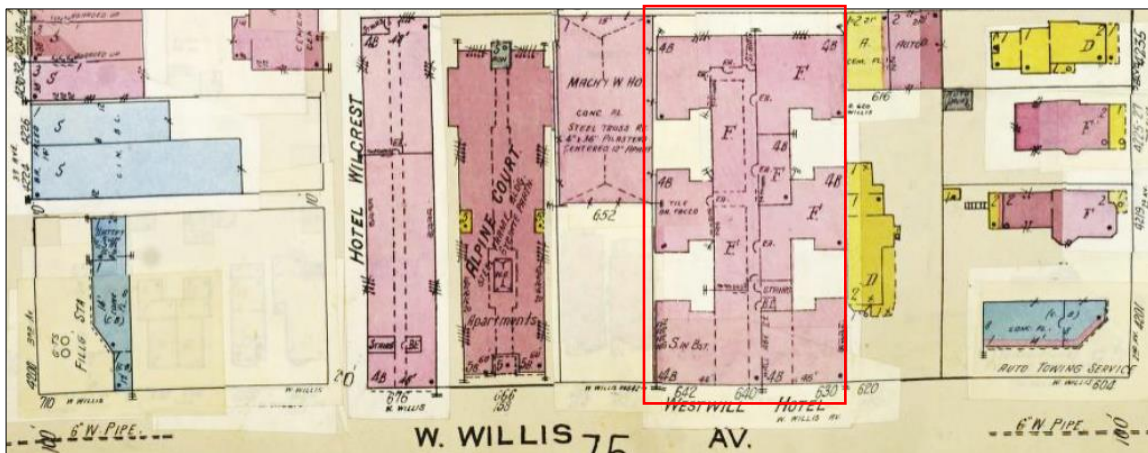
**STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH**

- The Willis-Selden Local Historic District was enacted on October 11, 2011.
- Based on the Sanborn maps, the existing building was erected on lots numbered 630, 640 and 642 W. Willis. However, the permit for the building, issued on September 18, 1925, was addressed as 634 W. Willis.
- The historic development of the block is illustrated in the below Sanborn maps.



1897 map shows a fully developed residential street with single-family dwellings and accessory buildings/stables. The lot now identified as 640 W. Willis is outlined in red.

1921 map shows a still dominantly residential street. However, a large apartment building and an auto painting building have taken the place of one dwelling and the livery, outbuildings are now identified for autos, and one empty lot (outside of the remaining auto garage) is now present.



1950 map shows there was a tremendous physical and usage change on this block since 1921. Only one 19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling remains, two “newer” large buildings, identified here as hotels – and one being 640 W. Willis, coupled with the existing “Alpine Court” and a “machinery warehouse” dominate the street, and a number of empty lots are now near Third.

The houses that were immediately to the west of 640 were demolished in the 1930s. The remaining dwelling at 620 W. Willis held on a few more years; the garage was demolished in 1959 and the dwelling demolished in 1960.



Staff photo, February 2024.

Reminders of the past: The West Will building, erected in 1925, had a setback that matched the residential houses that were then-present on either side. The 1950 Sanborn map is drawn incorrectly, as it shows the front of the building extends to the street edge.

As noted in the previous map, the garage and house immediately to the right/east (620) was demolished in 1959 and 1960, respectively. Ghost lines remain visible in the walls of 640 W. Willis.



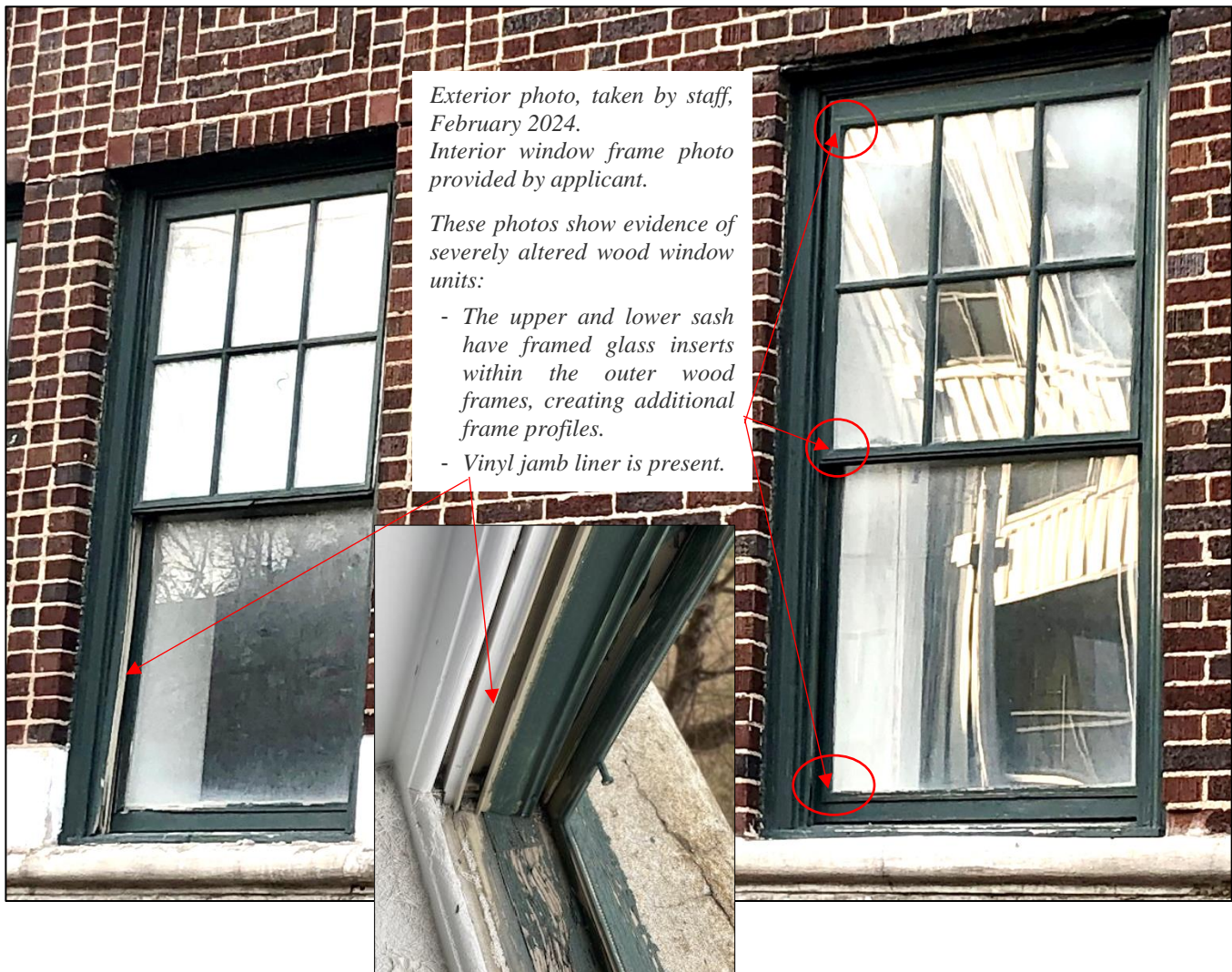
Google street view, May 2019.



- Upon review of the applicant's documents, staff requested dimensions of the existing wood windows and the proposed Weathershield aluminum-clad wood windows.

	Existing	Proposed	Change	Comments
Top Rail	2-7/8"	2-5/8"	1/8" smaller	Difference will not be perceptible
Meeting Rail	1-1/2"	1-7/8"	3/8" larger	Will only be minimally perceptible from the basement and first floor windows. Otherwise looking upward at an angle, increased 3/8" thickness likely won't be that noticeable.
Bottom Rail	3"	3-3/8"	3/8" larger	Same comments as above.
Stile	1-3/4"	1-7/8"	1/8" larger	Will not be perceptible.
Muntin/grille	1/2"	5/8"		Only one minimally profiled grille is available as a simulated divided light.

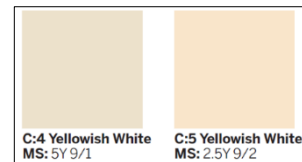
- While the applicant was compiling the dimensions of the existing and proposed windows, staff conducted the site visit to assess the existing windows. Based on field conditions and photos submitted by the applicant, it is staff's opinion that the windows on the front elevation are not historic, as the vast majority of the window components have been replaced with contemporary materials which added dimensionality to the window units along with visible vinyl components.



- When historic windows are missing (staff uses this term here as the windows are mostly constructed of replacement parts and are no longer historically and architecturally significant), the National Park Service's guidelines "[Replacement Windows that meet the Standards](#)" state:
  - Replacement windows for missing or non-historic windows must be compatible with the historic appearance and character of the building.
  - The appearance of the replacement windows must be consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period but need not replicate the missing historic window.
  - Replacing existing incompatible, non-historic windows with similarly incompatible new windows does not meet the Standards.
  - Upon determination that the front elevation windows are not historic, it is staff's opinion the selected Weathershield replacement windows will be compatible with the historic appearance of the building. The selected window line offers simulated divided-light "grilles", butt-joint cladding, and wood jamb liners (so the liners can be easily painted to match the cladding color, unlike the example shown above).

## ISSUES

- Within the “Replacement Windows that meet the Standards” document, it is also stated “replacement windows on secondary elevations that have limited visibility must match the historic windows in size, configuration, and general characteristics, though finer details may not need to be duplicated and substitute materials may be considered.”
  - Material - It is staff’s opinion the proposed vinyl windows are not “consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period” and are not “compatible with the overall historic character of the building”.
    - Through limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts. Vinyl windows offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood.
    - Consumer grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
    - The framing material, glazing, and seals (which keeps the argon gas intact between the insulated glass) of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than wood or steel-framed windows.
    - Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more greatly than wood and steel. This can result in discoloration and warping of the vinyl frames, as well as condensation between the glass layers.
  - Color - Availability of frame colors must be considered as most replacement windows have prefinished exterior cladding. Bright white, a popular color in contemporary architecture, was not often used on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Its use on replacement components would create too strong a visual contrast that is not compatible with the historic character of the building. White used historically was a varying shade of “yellowish-white” or ivory, similar to the examples shown here.
  - Placement – Windows are recessed within walls to differing depths, depending on the exterior wall material. For masonry buildings, windows sit deeply within the window opening and creates a differential of wall planes, so each element (wall and window) has equal visual presence on an elevation.
- This applicant photo (below right) of one of the courtyards shows two openings in which the proposed windows have been installed. It is evident the new windows are not consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period.
  - Flat/thick window frames do not match the proportionality of historic windows (and not even the dimensions of the existing replacement windows).
  - The bright white color offers a jarring and noticeable contrast to the brown brick and makes the windows too dominant.
  - The window frames are almost in plane with the masonry walls and eliminates the three-dimensional appearance of the wall.



HDC color chart.



Applicant photo. Recently installed non-approved vinyl windows are in the red lined box.

## RECOMMENDATION

### **Recommendation One – Denial – Replacement of vinyl windows with new vinyl windows**

Staff finds that the proposal for the replacement of the vinyl windows with new vinyl windows does not meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the following reasons:

- The “Replacement Windows that meet the Standards” NPS Guideline states “replacement windows on secondary elevations that have limited visibility must match the historic windows in size, configuration, and general characteristics, though finer details may not need to be duplicated and substitute materials may be considered.”
  - Vinyl windows are not “consistent with the general characteristics of a historic window of the type and period” and are not “compatible with the overall historic character of the building”.
  - Through limits of fabrication and material, vinyl windows are not appropriate for historic districts. Vinyl windows offer a plasticity and flat/thick appearance that does not adequately match the profile/dimensionality and appearance of historic windows, such as wood.
  - Consumer grade vinyl windows weather poorly, deteriorate rapidly, and exhibit poor detailing and detracting color/sheen.
  - The framing material, glazing, and seals (which keeps the argon gas intact between the insulated glass) of vinyl windows break down more quickly in ultraviolet light than wood or steel-framed windows.
  - Vinyl also lacks rigidity and can expand and contract more greatly than wood and steel. This can result in discoloration and warping of the vinyl frames, as well as condensation between the glass layers.
  - Bright white, the color of the proposed vinyl window, is a contemporary color. Its creates too strong a visual contrast that is not compatible with the historic character of the building.
  - The window frames are almost in plane with the masonry walls and eliminates the three-dimensional appearance of the wall.
  - Replacing existing incompatible, non-historic windows with similarly incompatible new windows does not meet the Standards.

*Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the work as proposed, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standard 9:*

- 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.
- 9) New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. 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.

### **Recommendation Two – COA – Replacement of non-historic wood windows with aluminum-clad wood windows.**

Staff finds that the proposal for the remaining work items will not alter the features and spaces that characterize the property and district and therefore recommends the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Elements of Design for the district.

*Staff recommends the Certificate of Appropriateness be issued with the following conditions:*

- The existing steel windows flanking the front entrance will remain in place.
- The 5/8” grille will be selected for the six-over-one upper sash, and the exterior cladding color will be submitted for staff review.
- The completed window order(s) for the building will be submitted for staff review.
- The existing wood brick mould will remain in place within each window opening and will not be covered with aluminum trim.