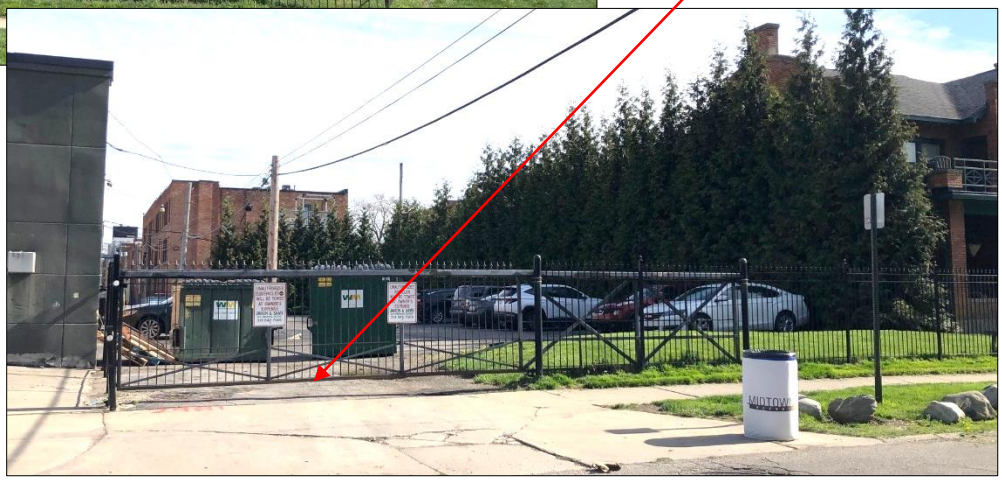
STAFF REPORT: JUNE 12, 2024 MEETING **PREPARED BY**: A. DYE
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00181
ADDRESS: 441 W. WILLIS
HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN LOCAL
APPLICANT: ROBERT SLATTERY, 441 W WILLIS LLC
PROPERTY OWNER: ROBERT SLATTERY
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: MAY 20, 2024
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: APRIL 19, 2024

SCOPE: ERECT MULTI-FAMILY BUILDING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The parcel at 441 W. Willis is currently a paved, gated surface parking lot. A vacated alley falls within the property lines.



Above: Looking southeast from Willis.
Right: Looking southwest from Willis.
Staff photos, April 19, 2024.

Top Right: Detroit Parcel Viewer.
Arrow points to vacated alley.

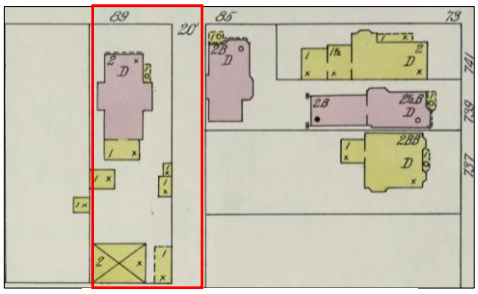
PROPOSAL

- Erect a two-story, four unit multiple-family structure.
- Add a twelve-car surface parking lot.
- Erect a dumpster enclosure.

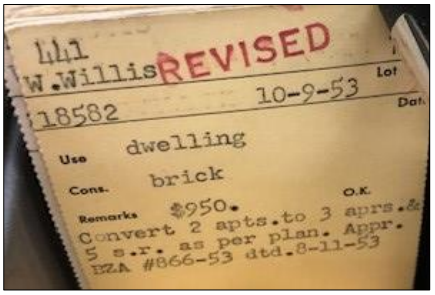
STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

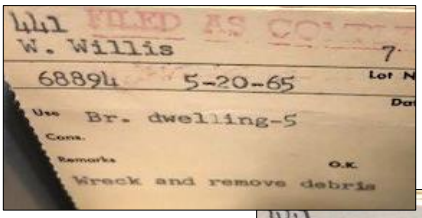
- The Willis-Selden Historic Local District was enacted on October 11, 2011.

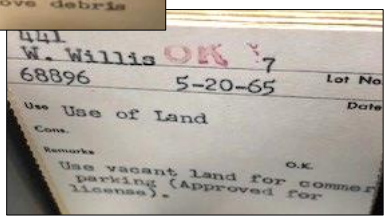
- The 1897 Sanborn map shows a residence and a number of out-buildings on this parcel.
- While dramatic changes to W. Willis between Cass and Second are documented on the 1897 and 1921 Sanborn maps, little changed for this property (original address 89 W. Willis) between 1921 and 1950. However, the property went through a number of conversions in the 1940s and 1950s to smaller and an increasing number of apartments and single rooms, culminating in the dwelling's demolition in 1965 and change of use for commercial parking.



1897 Sanborn map, Vol. 2

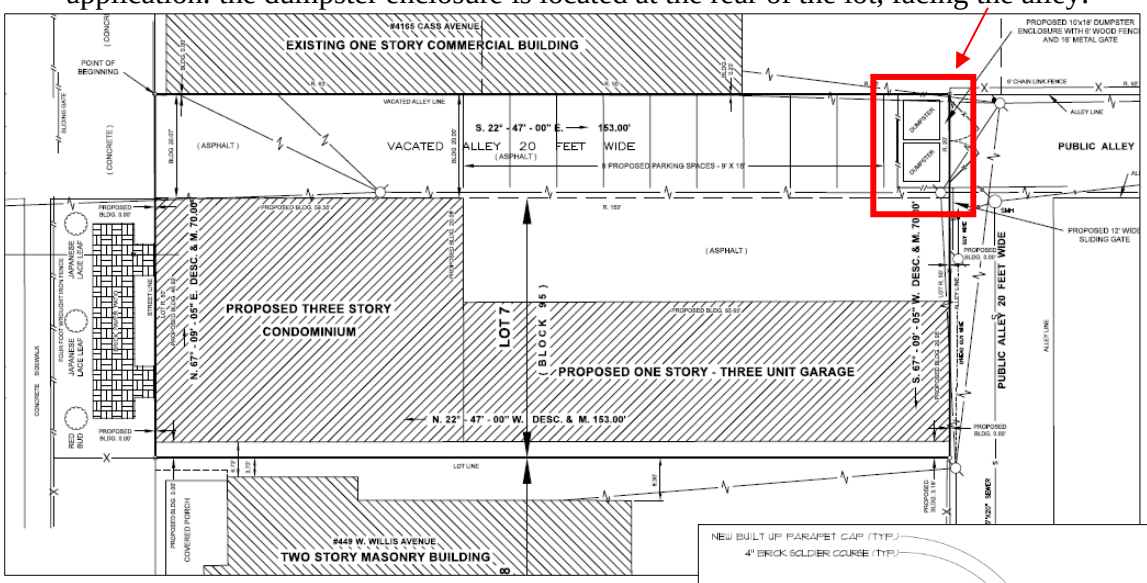


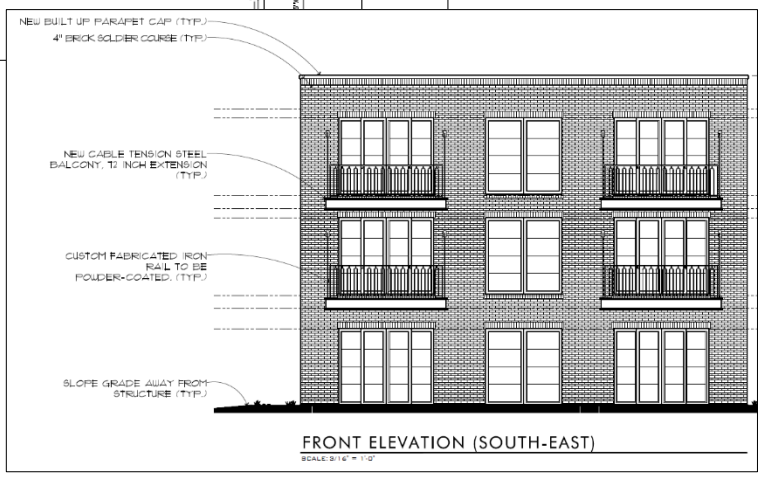




Building permit cards, BSEED.

- At the March 11, 2020 meeting, the Commission reviewed and issued a COA for a new construction application for the below three-story building and surface parking lot. A thing to note in this application: the dumpster enclosure is located at the rear of the lot, facing the alley.



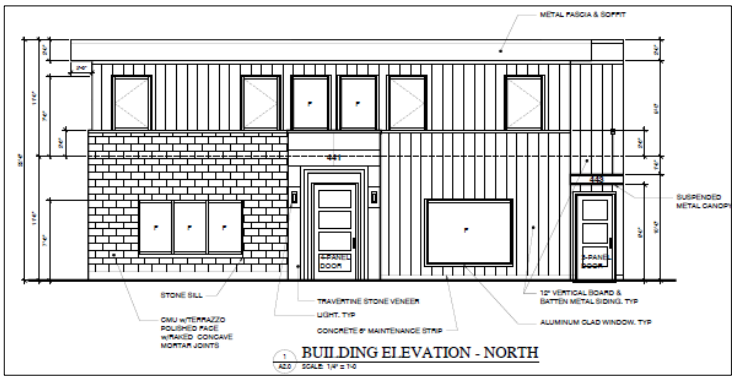


- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, Standard #9 states that new construction shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features of its environment.
- Staff reviewed the project against the district's Element of Design to determine its compatibility with the district. The elements highlighted in bold are discussed in this staff report.

1) Height
2) Proportions of buildings' front facades
3)Proportion of openings within the façades
4) Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades
5) Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets
6) Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections
7) Relationship of materials
8) Relationship of textures
9) Relationship of colors
10) Relationship of architectural details
11) Relationship of roof shapes
12) Walls of continuity
13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments
14) Relationship of open space to structures
15) Scale of façades and façade elements
16) Directional expression of front elevations
17) Rhythm of building setbacks
18) Relationship of lot coverages
19) Degree of complexity within the facades
20) Orientation, vistas, overviews
21) Symmetric or asymmetric appearance
22) General environmental character

Element 4 - Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades. *Despite a variety of building types, the overall impression is one of regular, repetitive openings arranged horizontally within façades.*

The facade has symmetrically placed windows and a dominant central door opening. The grouping of window openings, both mulled and single openings placed close together, creates a horizontal pattern at each floor. The second front door, which serves as the main entrance to three residential units, is deeply recessed from the primary wall, minimizing its visual impact on the facade.

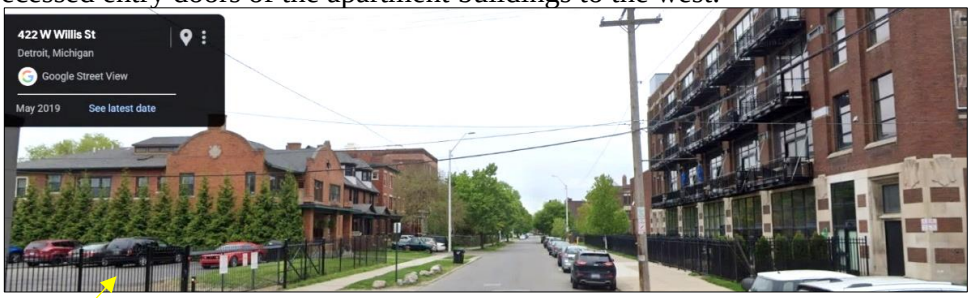


Applicant drawings

Element 6 – Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections- *Porches on smaller residential buildings typically project while those on other types of buildings usually do not. On residential buildings only, entrances are often located several steps above grade to accommodate high basements. Doorways on*

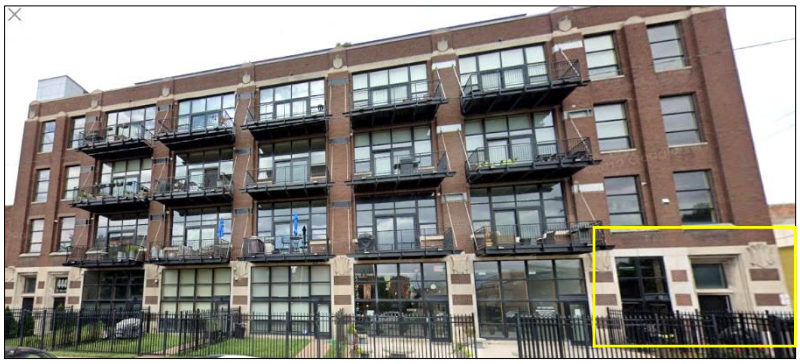
smaller residential buildings are often set beneath gable-roofed or arched openings, while doorways on other buildings are typically centered on their façades.

It is staff's opinion that the primary front entrance, which serves as the entry for the owner's first floor unit, takes into account the shape, massing, and materiality of the industrial building to the north, as well as the recessed entry doors of the apartment buildings to the west.



441 W. Willis, Google street view looking west towards Second Avenue.

The limestone entrance echoes the first floor window and door openings of the former industrial building across the street.



Applicant rendering. Google street view photos.

The recessed door is similar to the recessed entry doors of two historic apartment buildings that are three and four lots to west on W. Willis.

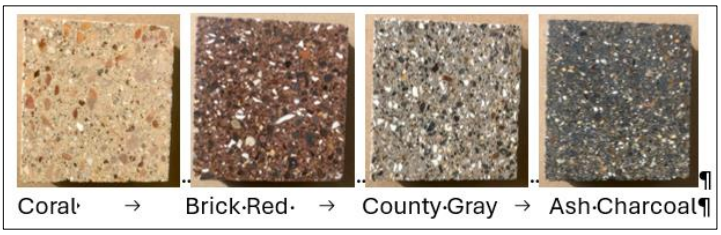
469 W. Willis *Staff photos, April 19, 2024.* *479 W. Willis.*

Element 7 - Relationship of materials. *A majority of buildings are faced with brick and feature stone or cast stone trim. Sash windows are historically wood but, in many cases, have been replaced with windows of modern materials. Stone is used for window sills on a majority of buildings within the district. While roofs within the district are generally flat and not visible, pitched roofs typically feature visible slate or asphalt shingles.*

There is a vast difference in usage of materials and colors for the proposed structure, in comparison with the color palette and materials used on the district's historic-age and contemporary buildings.

New Building	Existing Buildings
Four materials, using seven colors, are proposed for the façade.	*Typically two materials and colors are used on the facades.*
Most of the materials have varying sheen finishes.	*Most of the materials have matte finishes.*
- CMU (four colors)	*- Brick (if variegated brick is used, it is similar in color/tone and reads as a single, mottled color)*
- Metal board and batten siding	*- Stone (stone or cast stone)*
- Travertine	
- Metal soffit and fascia	

Streetscape view, looking west on W. Willis. Subject property is denoted by the metal fence at bottom left ( ). There are two dominant wall materials for each building on this block: brick and stone.



Above: Selected colors of CMU blocks, submitted by applicant and photographed by staff. Staff agrees the colors fall within the district's dominate colors.

Staff's concern is how the multiple cladding materials relate to the district as well as to each other. In contrast to the above streetscape photo, which shows two dominate wall materials and colors per building, the subject property has four wall materials and seven colors.

Element 8 - Relationship of textures. *On a majority of buildings within the district, the major textural effect is that of brick with mortar joints juxtaposed with cast stone or limestone trim. Patterned brickwork is used to create subtle detail on commercial and apartment buildings, such as spandrels and rectangular panels, and more pronounced textural interest where it exists on the upper stories of buildings ….Rough-cut stone with thick mortar joints creates considerable textural interest on buildings where it exists, while other buildings feature smooth stone with thin mortar joints.*

Out of the materials selected for the building, staff identified one for discussion by the Commission.

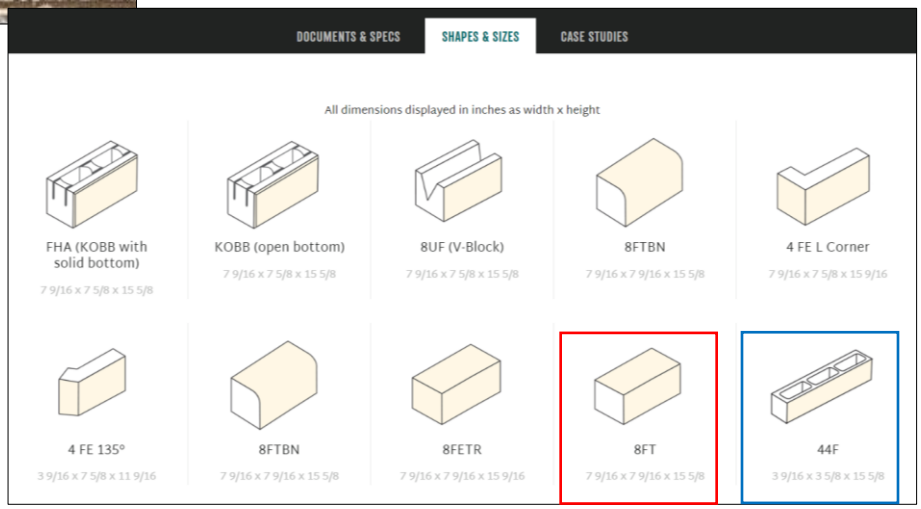
Trendstone Plus – architectural "ground face" CMU (concrete masonry unit) – which, according to the company's website, is an integrated color product that's polished to a smooth terrazzo-like finish. "Ground face" describes how the product is ground on its face to expose the aggregate.

It appears the company offers two dimensions of blocks: traditionally sized concrete blocks (similar to nominal block sizing of 8" deep x 8" high x 16" wide) and a narrow block (approx. 3-1/2" deep x 3-1/2" high x 15-1/2" wide) that offers a similar proportionality to Roman brick. The photo below shows both products together, offering a clear dimensional contrast between the two units. The applicant submitted samples of this product so the Commission can review the proposed colors and "terrazzo-like" surface finish.

The applicant selected the traditionally sized concrete block for the building, however the applicant calls it "stone veneer". It is staff's opinion that CMU walls are monolithic in appearance, even when multiple colors used, and the Commission has consistently denied the use of concrete block for exterior walls of residential buildings. As described in the Elements of Design, brick is the most common wall material, and this material translates well to contemporary designs and offers varied visual qualities, textures and brick patterns.

Left: Photo from Echelon Masonry's Facebook page.

Rows of Trendstone Plus units are identified with blue stars. This example shows the product in a size different than proposed by the applicant and is very likely "44F" (shown below). It is used as an alternating course with traditionally sized CMU.



Right: Page from Trendstone Plus website.

Selected product is CMU block and is boxed in red.
Dimensions:
7-9/16" deep x 7-9/16"high x 15-5/8" wide.

An additional size of CMU block is available and is boxed in blue.
Dimensions:
3-9/16" deep x 3-5/8" high x 15-5/8" wide.

Element 12 - Walls of continuity. *Fencing, often modern steel units that resemble historic cast or wrought iron fencing, exists at the front lot line of many properties, and suggests an additional wall of continuity.*

The proposal suggests retention of the existing front yard perimeter fence and inclusion of a swing gate. One of the renderings shows a gate in an identical design to the fencing.

Element 13 - Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. *The overall impression is that east-west streetscapes are abundantly planted whereas north-south streetscapes are not. Typical treatment of individual residential properties is a shallow, flat front lawn in grass turf, subdivided by a straight concrete walk leading to the front entrance.*

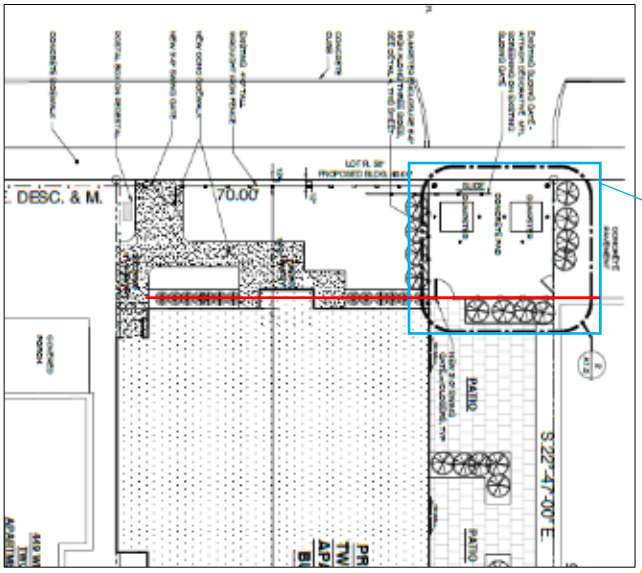
It is staff's opinion that the placement of the building, surface parking and proposed landscape for the front yard, including the retention of the existing transparent fence, is appropriate for this district and W. Willis location.

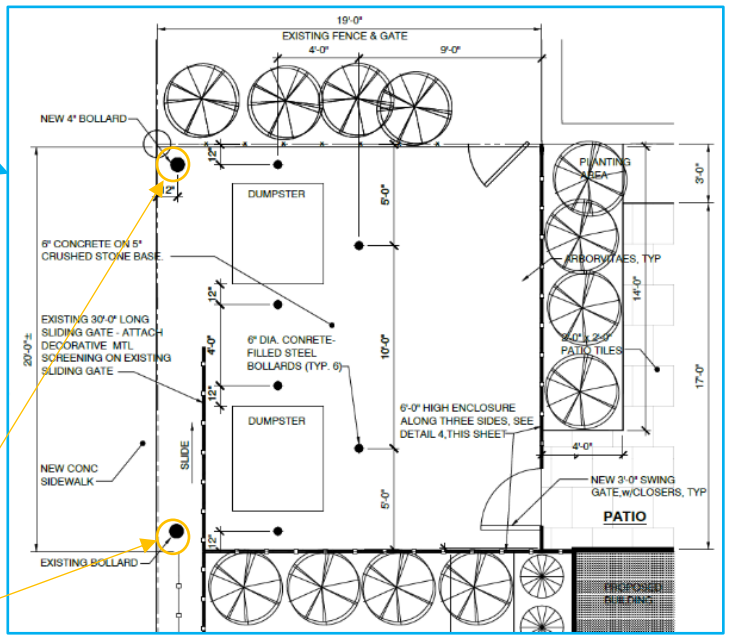
The placement and design of the garage enclosure, however, is not appropriate for this location and setting and does not meet Elements 12 and 13. The site plan shows the trash enclosure sits forward of the existing and proposed buildings. Additionally, three different wall materials are proposed for the four walled enclosure.

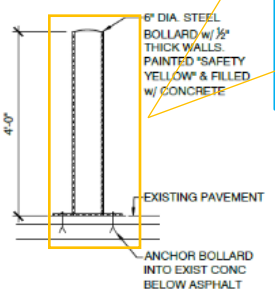
Front and East walls – The existing metal fencing and gates will remain as-is.
West wall - New metal fencing, to match the existing fence, will be installed. The applicant suggests attaching a privacy screen at this location. The product advertised in the cut-sheet is primarily used for jobs sites and tennis courts and is typically installed on chain link fencing. Color: green.
Rear wall – A 6'-0" plastic composite horizontal board fence will be installed. The shine and flatness of the manufactured material does not adequately match the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood or metal, the most common materials used in fencing and is incompatible for use in the historic district (and is in conflict with *Element 7 – Relationship of Materials* and *Element 8 – Relationship of Textures*).
The placement of this enclosure is incongruous to the district and destroys the site line of the streetscape and landscape. The use of three different fencing designs further disrupts the visual space of this lot and residential street.

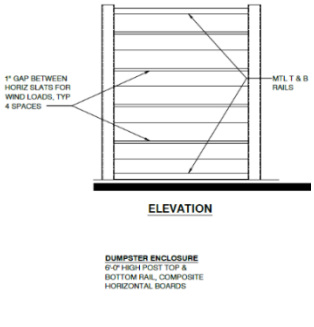
Staff photo, April 2024. *Above right: Magnified view of proposed enclosure.*

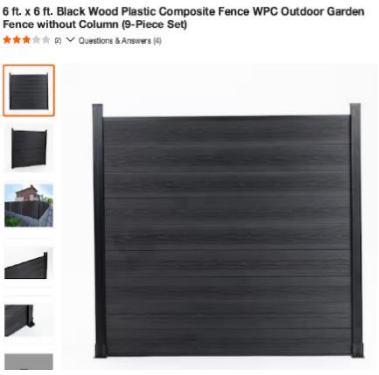
Details of enclosure.











Top left: Site plan – red line identifies setbacks of front walls of buildings.

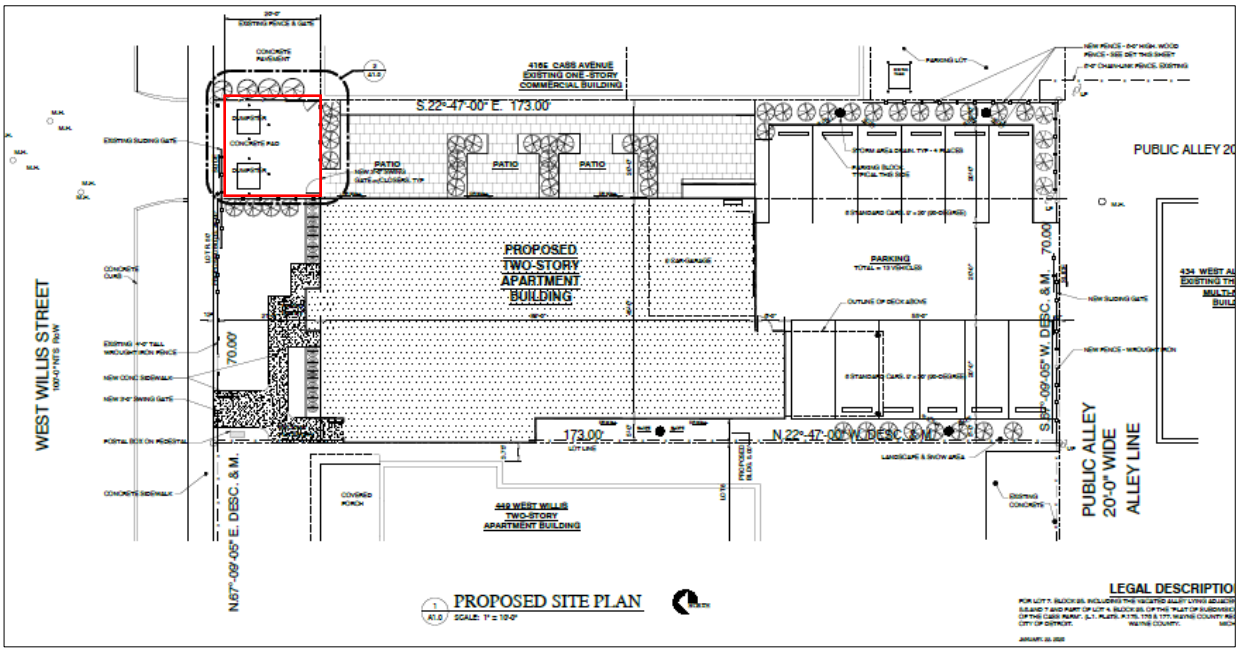
Top right: Plan of trash enclosure and bollards.

Center and right: Bollard and rear fence for enclosure.

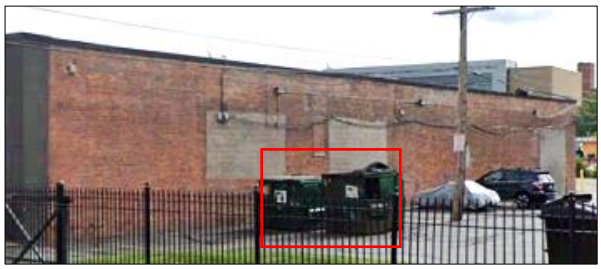
Bottom left: Cut sheet for privacy screen at east wall.

Bottom right: Applicant rendering showing trash enclosure and front yard fencing. Staff added orange circles to denote location of bollards, based on the site plan. The rendering shows the fence at the edge of the sidewalk, whereas in reality it is setback about six inches, likely enough room for the bollards.

The reason for the trash enclosure being proposed in the front yard is due to the entire rear yard being used for surface parking, and the remaining side yard (the former alley) being dedicated to outdoor space for building residents. Note: While the existing site plan identifies the trash bins being in the front yard now, Google street view shows the bins being located mid-block through October 2020. Staff's site visit photos taken in April 2024 show them closer to Willis but still behind the façade of the commercial building.



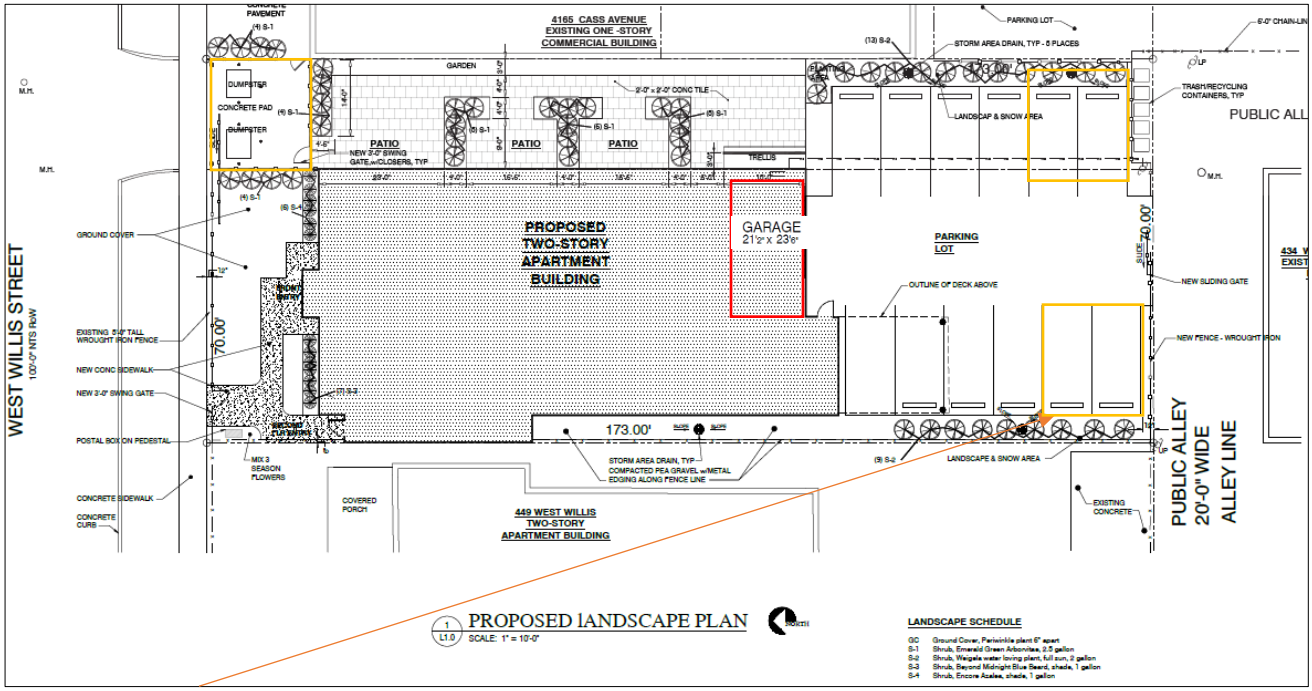
Applicant site plan.



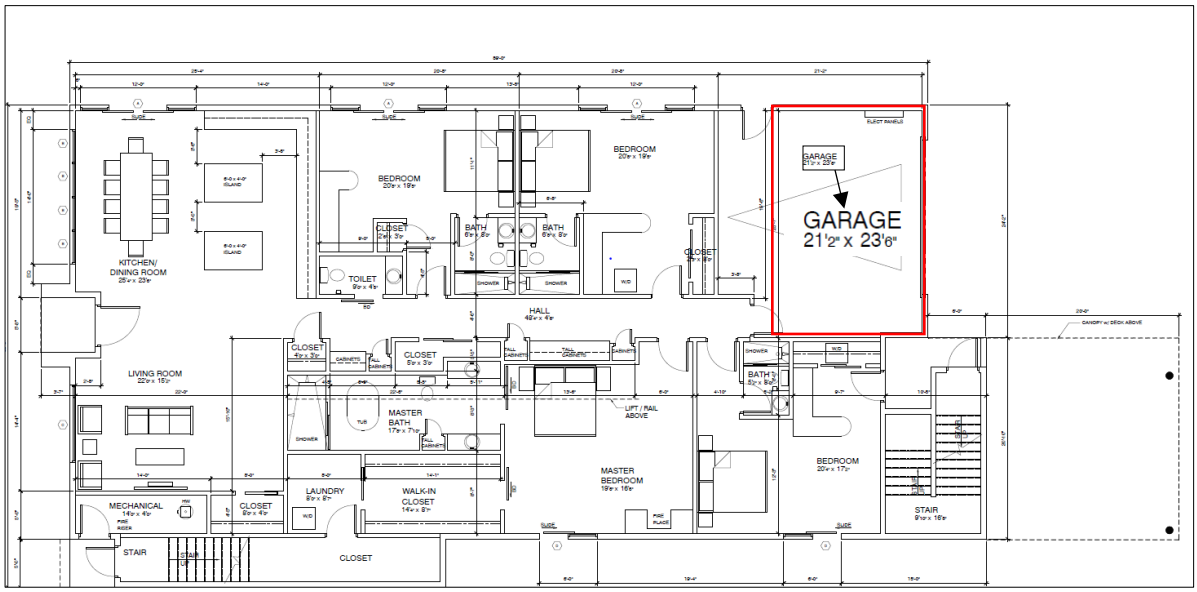
Google street view, October 2020.

Staff photo, April 19, 2024.

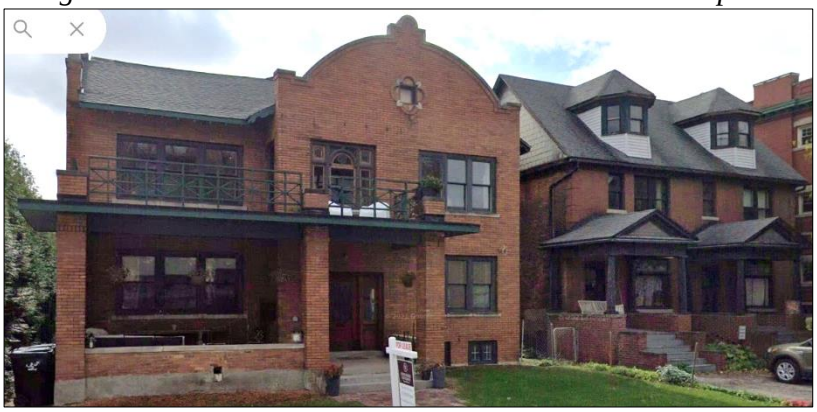
The proposal includes twelve surface parking spaces, but the application doesn't list the additional two indoor parking spaces designed at the back of the building (which are noted on the first floor's floor plan). Therefore, fourteen spaces are designed for the four-unit building. The applicant states zoning requires one parking space per unit and they wanted to achieve one space per bedroom. Counting the bedrooms: one four-bedroom unit, one three-bedroom unit, and two, two-bedroom units, there are eleven bedrooms in the building. It is staff's opinion the applicant could consider locating the trash enclosure at the top or bottom corner of the parking area, where it could open to the public alley. This would require the loss of probably two parking spots, but the project would stay within the goal of one parking space per bedroom.



Staff copied the space of the trash enclosure at the sidewalk to show how the trash enclosure at the alley could be accommodated by the reduction of two parking spots. This new location would require a redesign of the sliding gate parking lot enclosure; but more importantly, would keep the front yards and streetscape on Willis intact. In the 2020 new building application (site plan on page 2 of this staff report), the trash enclosure was proposed at the southeast corner of the rear lot.



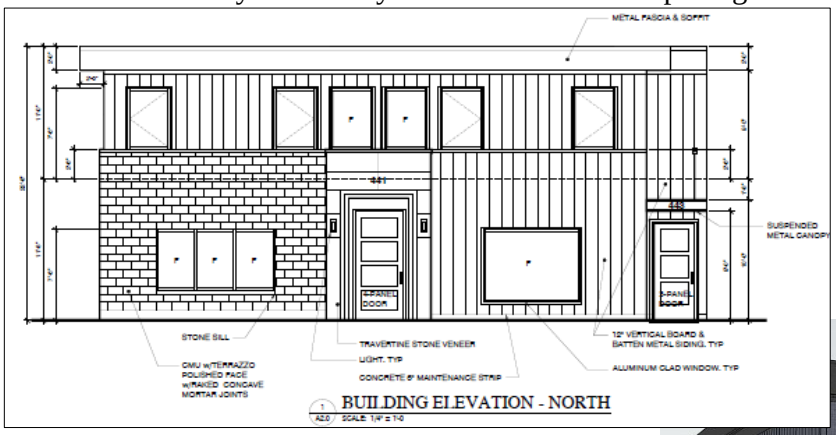
Element 16 - Directional expression of front elevations. *Façades of single-family residential structures are generally vertical in directional expression due to tall window and door openings and peaked rooflines. Apartment buildings generally range from neutral to slightly vertical in directional expression, though a smaller number are horizontal in directional expression.*



Google street view of adjacent buildings. 449 W. Willis 455 W. Willis 469 W. Willis 479 W. Willis

The 3-1/2- and 5-1/2- story apartment buildings (469 and 479 W. Willis) offer highly symmetrical designs, as does the 2-1/2 story dwelling (455 W. Willis). The balanced massing and consistent window/door openings are emphasized by singular contrasting window trim.

At 449 W. Willis, the building next door to the subject property, the asymmetrical massing of the house is balanced by the vertical and horizontal alignment of the window and door openings. It should be noted the windows at 449 W. Willis are one-over-one double-hung units, as shown above. The applicant's renderings consistently incorrectly show these window openings as casement units without any divisions.



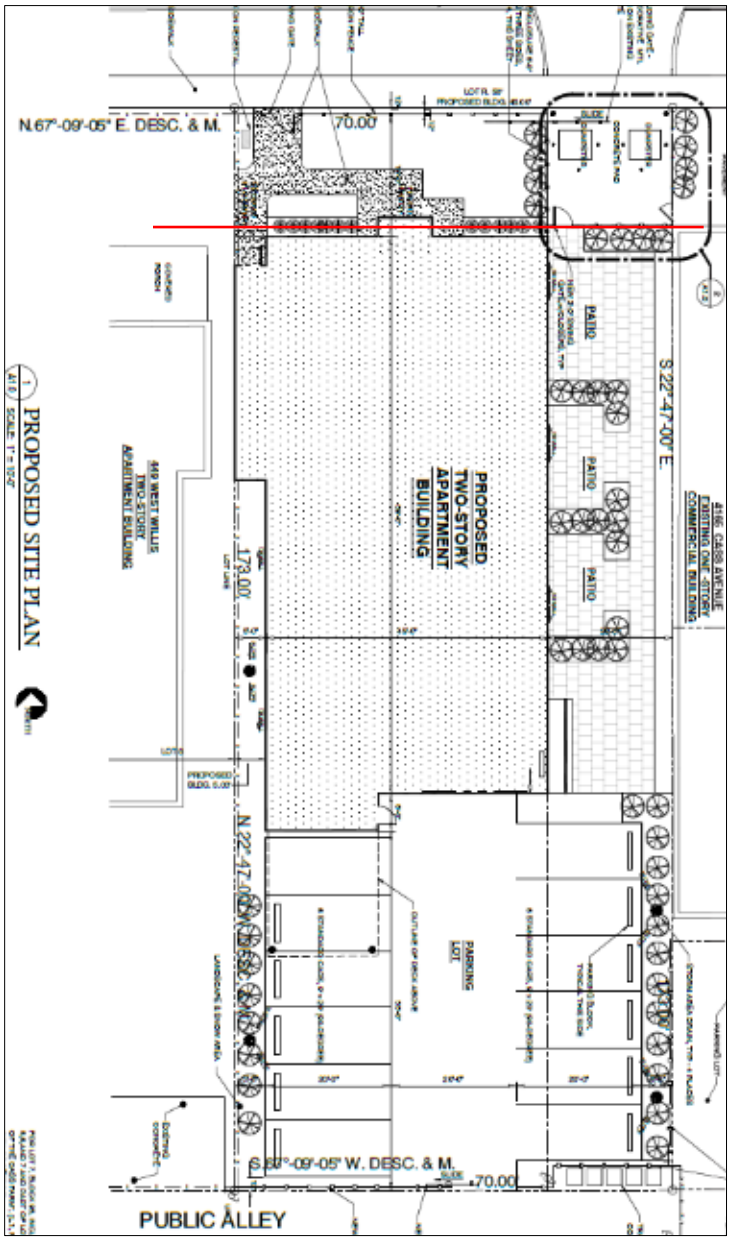
The proposed design includes vertically oriented window and door openings, similar to the surrounding buildings. The singular and mulled window openings create a uniform proportionality, with the exception of the large picture window. Staff recommends the large opening at the first floor be subdivided.

Applicant elevation and rendering. The windows at 449 W. Willis are depicted as casements, but they are 1-over-1 double-hung units.

17) Rhythm of building setbacks *- A degree of irregularity is introduced by varying setbacks of front façades; smaller residential buildings tend to be set back several feet from the public sidewalk, while larger apartment buildings and other buildings often occupy their entire lots. While setbacks may vary slightly from one building to the next, the overall impression is one of a consistent rhythm of building setbacks.*

The red line drawn along the front walls of the commercial and residential buildings to the east and west of 441. W. Willis shows the majority of the buildings have similar setbacks.

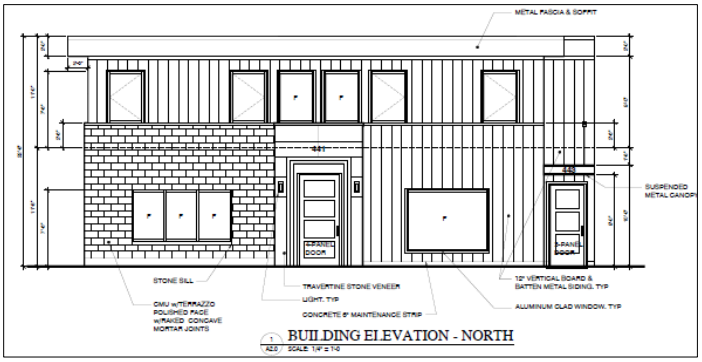
The renderings give the illusion that the new building sits well forward of the neighboring house. However, the site plan shows that the front wall sits minimally forward of the adjacent house, and matches the generally consistent placement of buildings on the south side of W. Willis.



Element 19 - Degree of complexity within the façades. *The façades within the district range from simple to complex, depending upon style. Overall, front façades tend to be simple in their massing and mostly regular in their fenestration, though a variety of window and door shapes, materials, architectural elements, and details of individual buildings increase the overall level of complexity of the district.*

The picture window breaks from the repetition and proportionality of window openings, and the four colors used for the masonry element is not found elsewhere in the district.

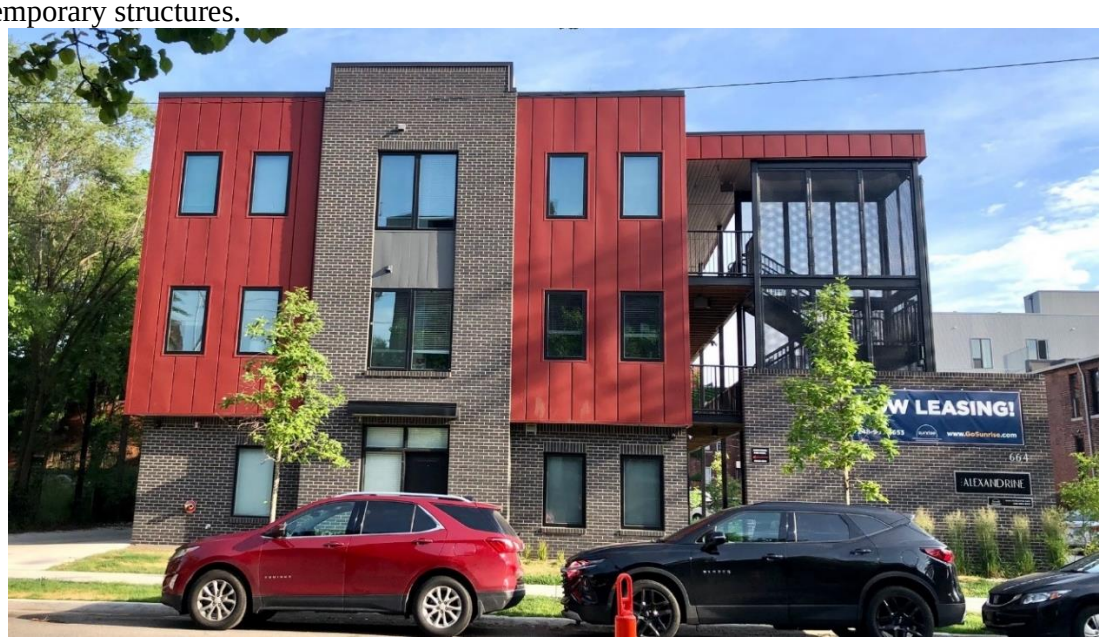
Element 21 - Symmetric or asymmetric appearance. *The appearance of front façades in the district, for the most part, is symmetrical. Single-family residential buildings tend to display a modest degree of asymmetry in massing and architectural detail.*



The proposed building is a distinctly contemporary design. Symmetrical window placement and a tall recessed front entrance offers compatibility with the surrounding residential buildings, and the contrasting cladding material on the west side of the building offers a defined asymmetrical element to the design.

ISSUES

- The large number of colors proposed for the masonry cladding creates an overly complex palette when viewed against the two colors used on the historic and new buildings within the district. The following two photos are of newly erected multi-family buildings, which exemplify the two color scheme for contemporary structures.



644 – 676 W. Alexandrine

655 W. Willis

- The traditional-sized CMU blocks are atypical materials for residential structures in this historic district and are not compatible with the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of brick.
- The trash enclosure at the front sidewalk is an incongruous placement within the district. The enclosure eliminates a significant portion of the lot's front yard which disrupts the walls of continuity and open space that characterizes the streetscape of the residential block. The selected enclosure materials include black metal, non-transparent black plastic (the shine and flatness of the manufactured material does not adequately match the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood) and non-transparent green-colored plastic privacy screen. The use of three different fencing designs further disrupts the visual space of this lot and residential street and both plasticized products are incompatible for use in the historic district.
- The elements discuss the dominance of repetitive openings on facades. The large picture window breaks from the repetition and proportionality of the single and mulled window openings. Fabricating a central mullion and installing two casement or fixed windows will create a similar verticality for this opening on the façade.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

Denial – Trash Enclosure

Staff recommends that the proposed trash enclosure should not qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Willis-Selden Local Historic District's Elements of Design:

- The enclosure's placement at the front sidewalk is an incongruous placement within the district. The enclosure eliminates a significant portion of the lot's front yard which disrupts the walls of continuity and open space that characterizes the streetscape of the residential block. The selected enclosure materials include black metal, non-transparent black plastic panels (the shine and flatness of the manufactured material does not adequately match the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood) and non-transparent, green-colored plastic privacy screen attached to metal fencing. The use of three different fencing designs further disrupts the visual space of this lot and residential street and both plasticized products are incompatible for use in the historic district.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the trash enclosure, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standard 9:

> *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.*

and Willis-Selden Local Historic District Elements of Design:

7) Relationship of materials,
8) Relationship of textures,
12) Walls of continuity,
13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

Certificate of Appropriateness - Remaining Work Items

Staff recommends that the remaining work should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Willis-Selden Local Elements of Design.

Staff recommends the COA be issued with the following conditions:

- One color will be used for the masonry element. This will significantly reduce the number of exterior colors on the building to be compatible with the dominant two-color palette of the existing buildings in the district.
- The traditional-sized CMU blocks are atypical materials for residential structures in this historic district and are not compatible with the profile, dimensionality, and appearance brick. Therefore, brick-sized CMU ground-faced blocks with the terrazzo-like finish can be considered, as can brick.
- The elements discuss the dominance of repetitive openings on facades. The large picture window breaks from the repetition and proportionality of the single and mulled window openings. Fabricating a central mullion and installing two casement or fixed windows will create a similar verticality for this opening on the façade.