

STAFF REPORT: OCTOBER 9, 2024 MEETING

PREPARED BY: B. BUCKLEY

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00514

ADDRESS: 2906 CASS

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CASS PARK LOCAL HD

APPLICANT: ANTHONY MORIN (ARCHITECT)

PROPERTY OWNER: CHRISTINA BOUKAS

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

SCOPE: ALTER PARAPET AND CORNICE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The building at 2906 Cass was constructed in 1925. The single story, masonry commercial building was heavily altered in 1941, when metal panels were added to the façade and traditional storefronts were replaced with glass block windows, though an alteration of the original character. A concrete block addition was also added to the rear of the building in 1941.



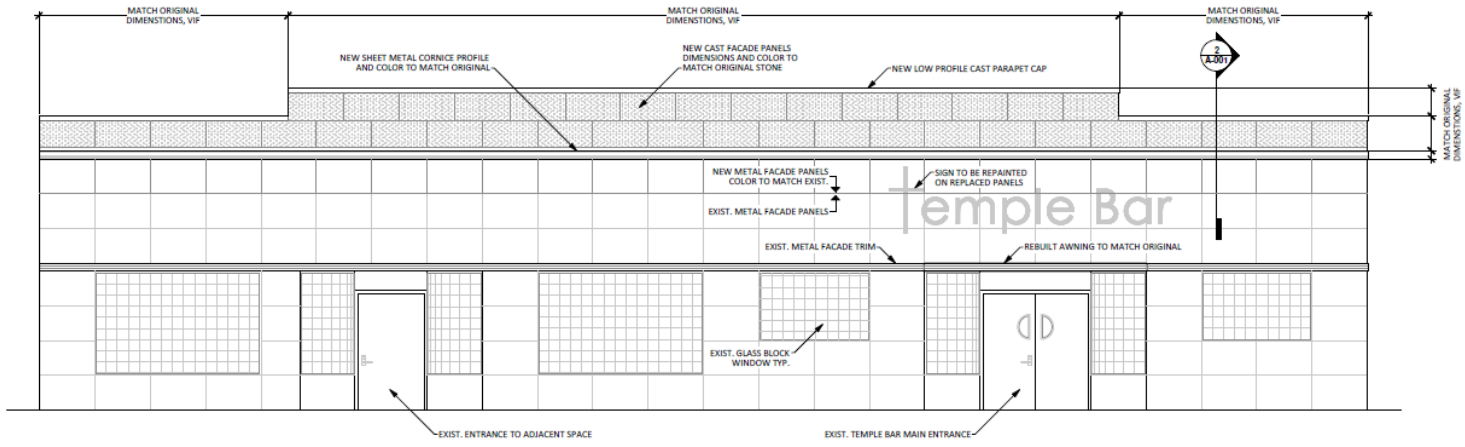
Figure 1: Current view of 2906 Cass, looking east.



Figure 2: Image of 2906 Cass from 2016 (date of designation). Image from Google Street View.

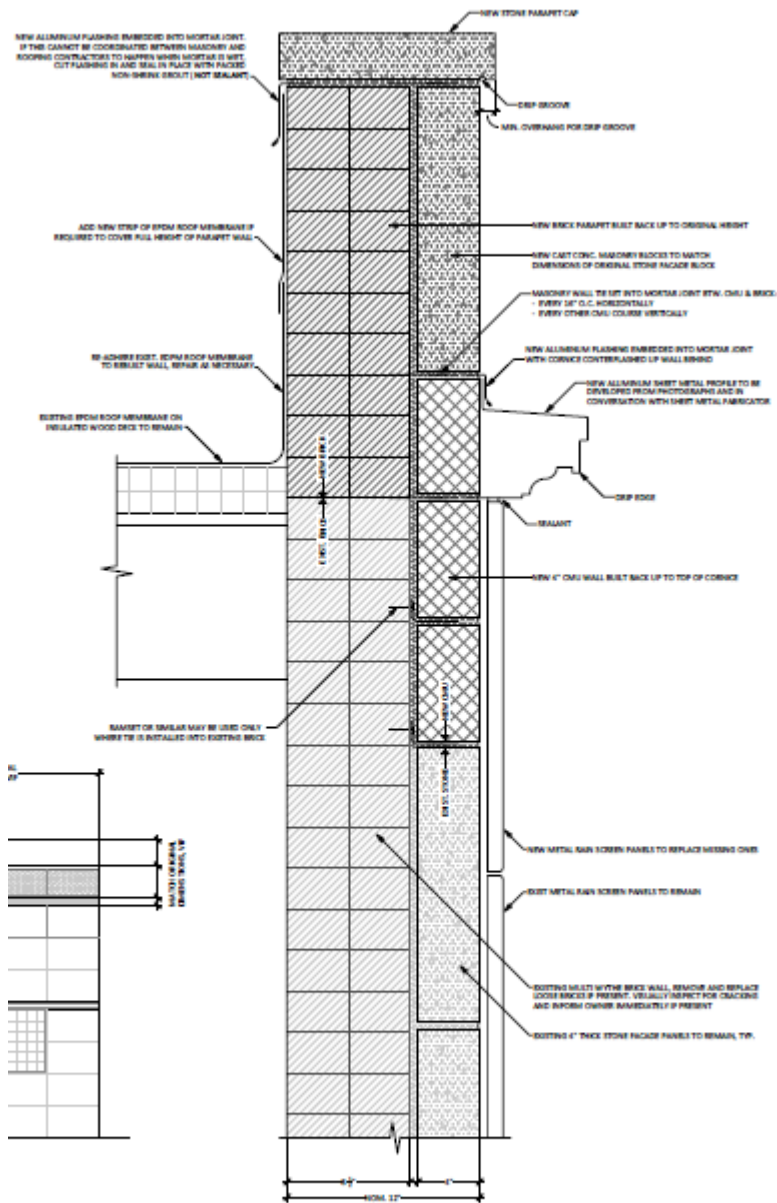
PROPOSAL

The applicant is proposing to rebuild a parapet and cornice on the structure following a partial collapse in spring of 2024. The parapet will be constructed of cast concrete blocks and mimic the stepped design of the original parapet. The new cast blocks will utilize a cream-colored aggregate to closely match the original (painted) stone parapet. A low profile cast concrete cap (or coping) will be added to the top of the parapet. The original parapet did not have coping, however it is proposed here in order to allow for the inclusion of a drip groove and to protect the mortar joints of the cast concrete parapet blocks. A formed, sheet-metal aluminum cornice line matching the profile of the original stone feature will also be installed. An awning matching the previous Art Moderne awning will be installed over the primary entrance. Where required, new metal panels will be fabricated and painted to match the existing 1941 units below the cornice line.



1 CASS AVENUE FAÇADE ELEVATION
1/4" = 1'-0"

Figure 3: Elevation showing the proposed parapet.



2 PARAPET RECONSTRUCTION SECTION DETAIL
3" = 1'-0"

Figure 4: Section detail of the proposed parapet and cornice.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Cass Park Historic District was established in 2016.
- 2906 Cass was originally constructed as two commercial storefronts. The building featured a stone façade, and a stepped parapet with classical carved stone details such as finials and scrolled brackets. In 1941 the building was clad in metal panels, the original storefronts were replaced with glass block windows, and a curved awning was added resulting in the existing Art Moderne façade. However the original cornice remained above the applied metal panels.

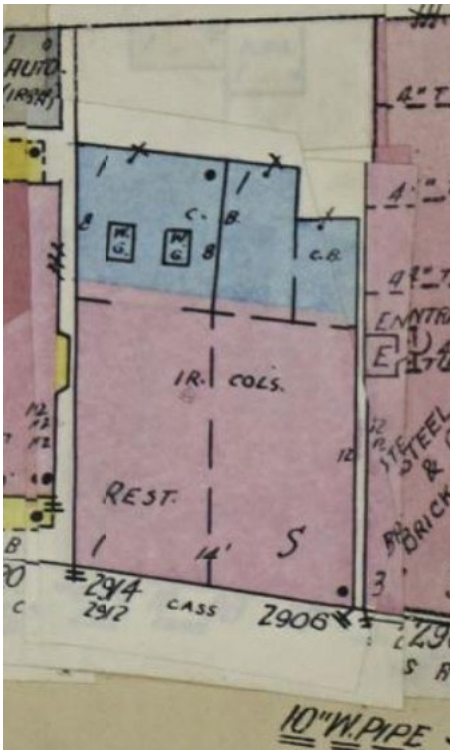


Figure 5: 1950 Sanborn map showing the 2906 Cass.



Figure 6: Image of 2906 Cass showing the original storefront ca. 1935. Image via Old Detroit website. <https://olddetroit.tumblr.com/post/4324190538/temple-bar-detroit>

- On May 24, 2024, a portion of the original cornice and parapet of the building collapsed onto the sidewalk of Cass Ave. The 1941 awning was damaged by the collapse, and some of the painted metal panels were lost.

- During the time between the initial parapet collapse and the current application. The remaining portions of parapet were removed from the façade and disposed of. A new brick backing for the proposed parapet has been constructed without HDC review.
- The applicant claims the stone parapet pieces were damaged from the collapse and unable to be reinstalled. Photographs from the time of the collapse do indicate pieces of the parapet were damaged, however substantial portions remained on the building, including three of the carved stone pieces.



Figures 7,8: Images of the collapsed stone parapet.

ISSUES

- The replacement metal panels and awning will closely match the original features. It is staff's opinion that these elements of the project are appropriate and meet the standards.
- According to the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, Standard Number 6; *Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.* According to the standards, the cornice and parapet should be replaced in-kind, including the carved detailing. The applicant claims recreating the carved stone detailing is financially and technically impractical. Per the applicant; "The original parapet has two formal/figural features: a) a higher middle portion of parapet flanked by lower portions at either end, and b) carved ornamental details where this rise/fall occurs and at either end of the parapet wall. The carved ornamental pieces were destroyed when they fell to the ground. Even if we were able to find skilled labor adequate to carve new replacements, the cost of doing so would impose a prohibitively high financial burden on this small business. Other alternatives like fabricating negative formworks and casting replicas of the original would pose similar financial burden and be of lesser quality. The rise and fall of the parapet, however can be recreated and we propose to do so identically to the original dimensions and proportions of the building."
- Staff acknowledges reproducing matching carved stone details may be financially and technically impractical. However, it is staff's opinion recreating these carved features in a feasible and appropriate replacement material should be further investigated.
- It is staff's opinion that cast concrete blocks are an appropriate substitute material for the stone parapet. However, staff notes that the "cream color" of the block was the result of paint applied to cornice/parapet ca. 2009, prior to the establishment of the district. It is staff opinion that cast concrete block should be tinted to match the gray façade stone present beneath the metal panels, in the case that a future applicant/owner would seek to uncover the original façade. HDC staff can approve the painting of a new cornice to match the conditions at the time of designation.
- Staff also has concerns regarding the longevity of the formed aluminum cornice. While the proposed cornice may initially be a visually acceptable substitute for the original stone, it is probable that as the replacement feature ages and weathers that dents and scrapes will reveal the true material of the cornice.

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation – Denial – Alter Parapet and Cornice

Staff finds that the proposed project does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation for the following reasons:

The original stone parapet, with its classically derived carved stone detailing, was the remaining visible portion of the original façade, and helped to visually demonstrate the building's architectural evolution over the first half of the 20th century. The proposed replacement lacks the distinctive character defining elements of the original parapet and is not an appropriate replacement.

Therefore, staff recommends a denial for the project as it does not meet Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, particularly Standards 2, 5 and 6;

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.

5. Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials