

STAFF REPORT: 12/11/2024 MEETING

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

ADDRESS: 4642 SECOND AVENUE

APPLICATION NO: HDC2024-00656

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WARREN-PRENTIS

APPLICANT/OWNER: JOHN HADDAD

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11/23/2024

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/18/2024

SCOPE: INSTALL NEW SIGNAGE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The building located at 4642 Second Avenue was originally erected for James McEldowney ca. 1885 as a 2 ½-story, single family house. Records maintained by the Detroit Building Safety Environmental and Engineering Department indicated that the building's upper stories were removed in 1939 when the property's use was converted to a commercial medical facility known as the Web Clinic. The building features a flat roof and exterior walls are clad with brick at the original/front portion. Concrete block is located at the rear/the portion of the building that was erected in 1939. Windows are recently installed aluminum units. A wood deck, installed in 2018, wraps around the building's north and west facades.

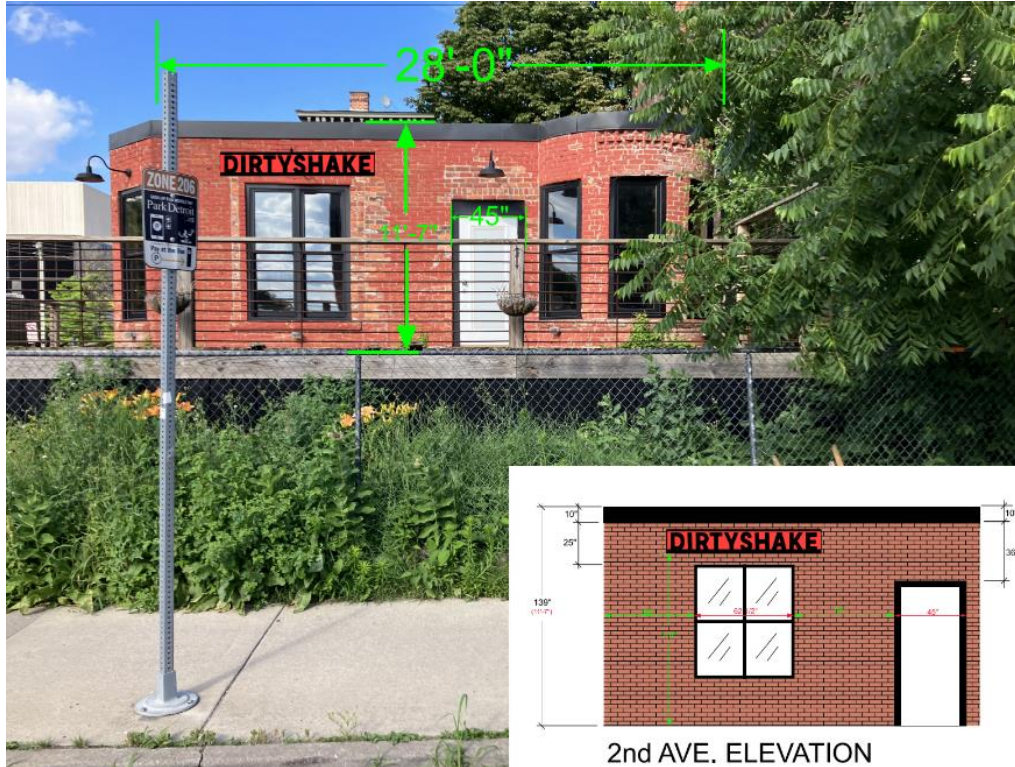


4642 Second Avenue, current conditions. Staff photo taken on 11/23/2024

PROPOSAL

With the current submission, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to install two new signs at the building's exterior walls. Specifically, the project includes the following:

- The installation of a 14"x96" aluminum box sign with backlit cutout aluminum letters on an aluminum raceway above a set of paired windows at the west elevation per the below. The sign shall read "DIRTY SHAKE"
- The installation of a 14"x96" aluminum box sign with backlit cutout aluminum letters on an aluminum raceway at the north wall. The sign will be mounted on the building's former chimney per the below and shall read "DIRTY SHAKE"



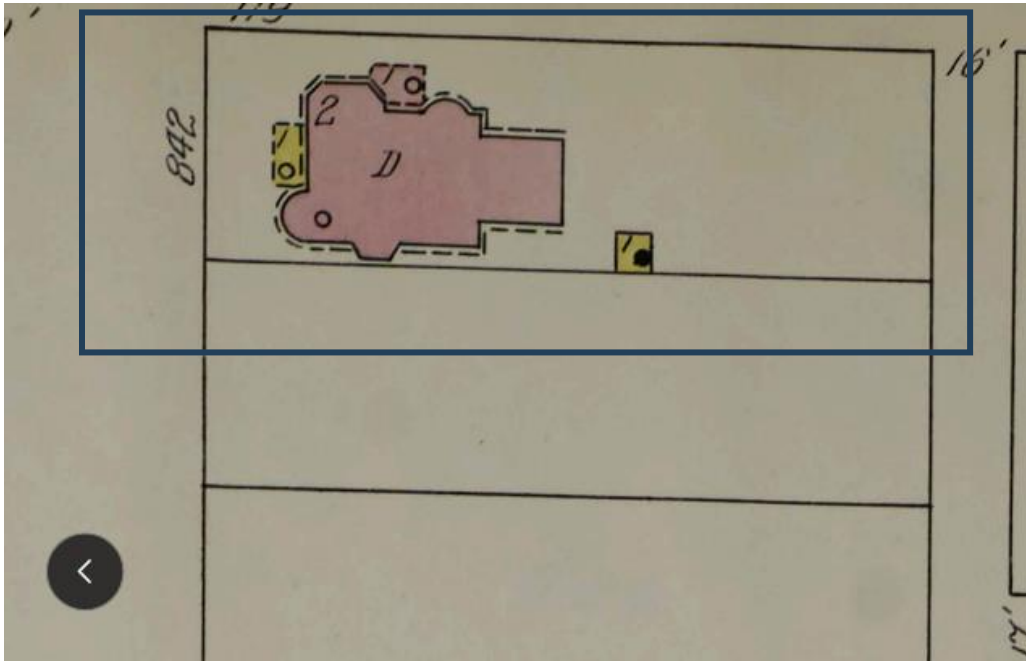
Sign proposed for west wall. Image by applicant



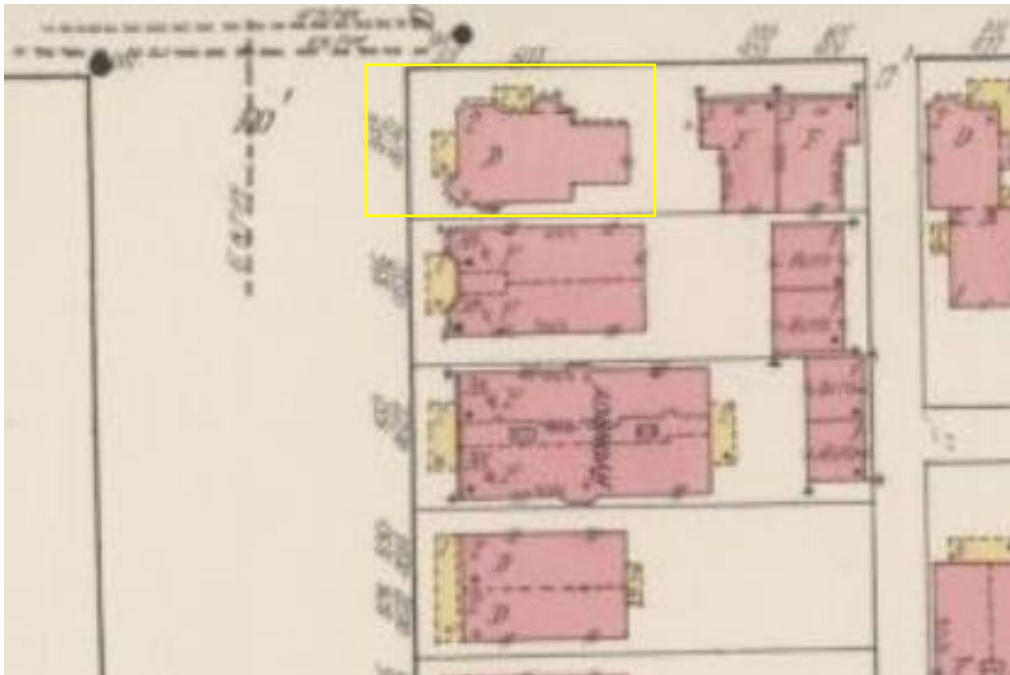
Sign proposed for north wall. Image by applicant

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- Warren-Prentis was designated as a local historic district in 2001
- Warren-Prentis was designated as a National Register Historic District (NRHP) in 1999. Please note that the NRHP nomination determined that 4642 Second Avenue was a Non-Contributing building to the historic district. See the below photos and Sanborn Maps which depict the building's evolution over time:



Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1887. 4642 2nd Avenue outlined in blue. Note that the building was addressed as 842 Second Avenue/119 Forest at that time.



Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1921. 4642 2nd Avenue outlined in yellow.



4246 Second Avenue, photo taken ca. 1920, prior to renovation for use as a clinic.

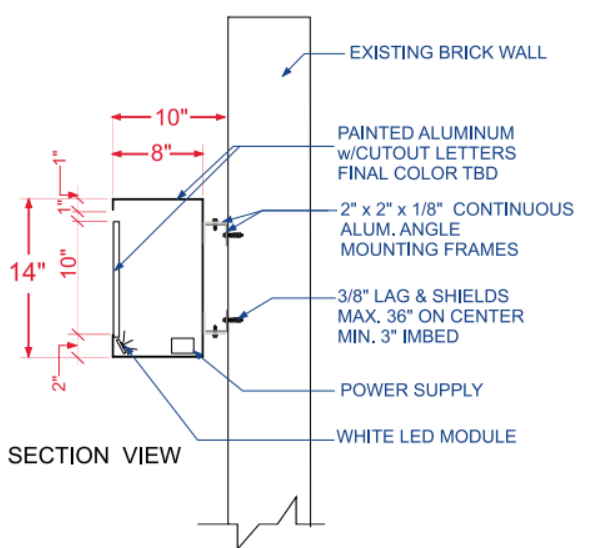


Sanborn Fire Insurance map, 1950. 4642 2nd Avenue outlined in green. Note that a rear concrete block addition has been erected and the building's upper stories have been removed by this point



Designation slide showing appearance in 2000. HDAB

- The current windows, deck, and painting was approved by the Detroit Historic District Commission at their January 22, 2020 special meeting (Application HDC #20-6605)
- As noted previously, the proposed new signs are aluminum and will consist of black letters on a black raceway which will sit in an open backing. The light module will be located at the base of the sign, behind the raceway (see the below section drawing).



Section view of proposed new signs. Provided by applicant

- For context, the applicant (Spectrum Neon Sign Co.) has noted that the proposed signs will resemble the signage that exists at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD). See below. Note that MOCAD is not in a local historic district. As such, staff is not providing the

below image of the MOCAD signage in an effort to speak to its historic appropriateness. Rather, staff is providing an image of the MOCAD signage in an effort to illustrate the design of the new signs that are proposed for installation 4642 Second Avenue.



MOCAD. Google Streetview, 2018. The new signs proposed for installation will resemble the above

- See the below link to the Detroit Historic District Sign and Awning Guidelines [Microsoft Word - Signs & Awning Guidelines FINAL](#). While the design of the proposed new signage does appear to conform to the HDC's guidelines, the placement of both signs does not meet the requirement for *Position*, which states the following:
 - Signs should be placed on buildings consistent with sign location on adjacent buildings
 - Signs should be located where architectural features or details suggest a location, size, or shape for the sign

Staff notes that that signage is typically located immediately above the storefront or main entry door within the context of a traditional commercial façade. See the below to note the location of the building's two entry doors. Per the submission, the applicant is seeking to install the signs above a set of windows at the west façade and the location of the former fireplace at the north wall rather than installing the signs over the north and west façade doorways.



Staff photo. Yellow circles indicate exterior doorways. The application proposes to install the new signs here rather than above the doorways.

- The building has been identified as Noncontributing to the district due to the significant alterations which were undertaken to support its change of use from single-family residential to commercial. As the building has been deemed to be Non-Contributing to the district, the proposed new exterior work/signage should be reviewed within the lens of “compatibility” within the adjacent historic surrounds/established patterns within the district to ensure that it does not detract from the historic district. As noted above, the new signs are proposed for the following placement:
 - Above a set of paired windows at the 2nd Avenue facing/west façade
 - On the former chimney at the north wall

While the proposed sign locations are unconventional, staff does acknowledge the following regarding this Noncontributing building and the current proposal:

- This building is unique within the district/there are no buildings in the near vicinity which were originally erected to serve as a single family residence but subsequently heavily modified in order to accommodate a commercial use. As such, staff was unable to identify a distinct “established pattern” for signage in the district within this context.
- As the current context is unique and the Commission reviews all applications for work on a case-by-case basis, the proposed locations will not set a precedent for signage at other properties within the district
- The building was originally a single family residence and therefore lacks a traditional signband area which would commonly be found on a purpose built commercial building
- As notes above, it is staff’s opinion that the design of the proposed signage conforms to the Commission’s guidelines
- The element of design entitled “Environmental Character” emphasizes the district’s “vitality” as “...a result of the mixture of uses and the correspondingly diverse physical appearance of its architectural resources.”
- The work is easily reversible

For these reasons, staff recommends that the Commission approve the project.

ISSUES

- None

RECOMMENDATION

Recommendation - Section 21-2-78. Determination of the Historic District Commission – Certificate of Appropriateness

It is staff’s opinion that the proposed project generally meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and conforms to the district’s Elements of Design. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the project as proposed.