

March 20, 2023; REVISED April 6, 2023

Detroit Historic District Commission
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center
2 Woodward Ave #808
Detroit MI 48226

RE: 1550 Woodward Avenue

Dear Historic District Commission:

Kraemer Design Group (KDG) is writing to submit information to the Detroit Historic District Commission (HDC), on behalf of 1550 Woodward Avenue LLC regarding the rehabilitation and proposed addition to 1550 Woodward Avenue. Building owner 1550 Woodward Avenue LLC proposes to renovate the building to include approximately 14,000 square feet of food and beverage space for a single tenant, spread across the basement, first floor and mezzanine, and rooftop. The proposed work detailed in this application includes a new façade, new masonry cladding, new storefronts, new entrance doors, and an addition and patio on the roof. Each of these items is described below in more detail.

Historic Occupants and Designations

The building was constructed in 1963, replacing an earlier four-story brick building. The original tenant was Kay Baum, a locally women's clothing store. Kay Baum occupied the building until 1977 when the building was sold to Tall-Eez Shoes. Tall-Eez remained in the space until 2004. The building has been vacant since that time. Note that, although located in the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District, the building is listed as non-contributing and, indeed, the building retains little original fabric and what does remain was constructed outside the period of significance for the district. The period of significance for the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District is implied as being 1886 to 1941 in the City of Detroit's Local Historic District Final Report.

In 2004, drawings were completed, and work begun, on the renovation of the building for a local restaurant. As part of that work, some interior work was completed, demolishing all interior partitions. An elevator and stair were added to access the roof, and trusses were installed for a future roof deck. The work stopped abruptly in 2005 and never restarted. The CMU elevator shaft, stair penthouse enclosure, roof deck trusses, guardrail, and mechanical grillage all remain.

Integrity/Current Conditions:

The façade is currently boarded over with plywood which has been painted black. The plywood is supported by an aluminum frame structure which was built to enclose the inside of the building. This was done because all storefront components and glazing on the façade of this building are no longer extant (see interior photo #1 and #3). Beyond the metal canopies and a small amount of travertine cladding on the primary façade, the building retains little of its original materials on both the exterior and the interior. Because the building is non-contributing and because so little original fabric remains, it is proposed that the building will be rebuilt, utilizing some structural components of the original structure, but largely rebuilding and expanding upon what remains.

Overview of the New Design:

Much of the building will be demolished and rebuilt. This will include removing the doors, plywood cladding, and the metal canopies. A new façade has been designed, taking inspiration from materials seen throughout the historic district, including brick, large format storefront glazing, and granite. These materials were selected to blend with the historic district, however, the composition of these materials on the new façade are not falsely historic. The new building design slightly enlarges the overall scale and massing of the extant building; however, the design is well within the precedent scale and massing of the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District. Buildings on the 1500 block of the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District average 5.4 stories. The proposed design for 1550 Woodward is two stories (first floor and mezzanine) with an outdoor roof deck and a tenant occupied rooftop addition thus coming it at three occupiable stories in total.



Demolition:

The building will largely be deconstructed down to a few structural components in good condition. Demolition includes the black plywood sheathing and the metal canopies on the primary façade, the entirety of the steel framing components on the roof, and large portions of the perimeter masonry walls. Note that the intent of the project is to retain as much of the original load bearing wall structure as possible. The extant elevator penthouse and shaft appear to be in good condition and will be retained. However, it appears that large areas of the remainder of the north wall are in poor condition, and it is assumed that the majority of this wall will need to be demolished and reconstructed. The remaining alley wall may also need to be demolished once conditions are further assessed during roof removal. The south party wall with Bleu will be retained—any failed or missing portions of the party wall with Bleu will be repaired and/or replaced with like materials if too deteriorated to repair. Thus, the new building will rely on some of the existing structural components but will also add new structure to support the expanded building and the rooftop addition.

Masonry:

Currently the building is primarily comprised of black plywood panels with small amounts of beige travertine found in between each canopy bay. All of these materials are not historic and will be removed. The new façade will be clad in dark grey iridescent brick with a honed granite base at the sidewalk. Glass fiber reinforced concrete (GFRC) is proposed as a potential material to frame the storefronts and to cap off the parapet, however, GFRC will only be used if it can be color and texture matched to the honed granite based at grade. If the GFRC is not a good match, then honed black granite will be used to frame the storefront components and to cap off the parapet.

The south side of the building abuts a neighboring building, called Club Bleu. Both buildings structurally share a masonry party wall. This project looks to remove all existing structural connections of 1550 Woodward to the party wall, and rebuild a new load bearing masonry wall, separate of the party wall, to take the new roof and floor loads of 1550 Woodward. In order to achieve this, the entire 1550 roof structure including trusses, beams, and decking must be removed. New steel columns will then be constructed, and new floor and roof trusses installed between the existing north wall and new south wall. The existing party wall and associated support structure for Club Bleu will not be affected. A new rear stair of CMU will also be constructed, and this will help stabilize the building laterally.

The north façade of the building is currently a rough CMU block wall with weeping mortar in poor condition while the east façade is currently common brick, painted white. Two options are being pursued with these walls: If the North wall is determined to be stable, it will be re-clad with the dark bronze metal rainscreen system. If it is determined to be in too poor a condition to repair, the north wall will be demolished and reconstructed using load bearing CMU. In that case, the CMU will be painted a pale gray to match the alley wall behind the elevator shaft, and will receive a dark brick veneer to match the front façade. Likewise, if the project is able to retain the east wall, the brick will be tuckpointed and cracks will be repaired. Once the repairs are completed, the east wall will be repainted a pale gray color. If it's determined that the east wall is not stable once the roof and north wall are demolished, the entirety of the east wall will be reconstructed with loadbearing CMU masonry, and painted a pale gray. Finally, a parapet wall will be built up on the west façade to provide screening and privacy for the rooftop patio and addition—see Rooftop section below for more details. Please see drawings and renderings for additional details.

Storefronts & Doors:

The new storefront systems will be dark bronze in color and will feature spandrel panels between the first floor and the second floor. The new façade divides the building into three distinct bays. The northernmost bay has two single entry fully glazed doors set within an aluminum frame with glazed sidelights and transom. The doors will be a dark bronze aluminum in color. A dark bronze canopy, suspended over the entry with tie rods, will cover the primary entrance and will be anchored to a spandrel above the entrance. Above the primary entrance, at the mezzanine level, a fully glazed storefront with four vertical mullions and one horizontal mullion will provide light into the double height space inside. The middle and southernmost bay will receive a fully glazed storefront with a spandrel panel to divide the lower level storefront from the upper mezzanine storefront. A large horizontal pivot operable storefront will be provided at grade in both storefront bays. All of these storefronts will also have four vertical mullions and one horizontal mullion.

On the east façade two additional doors will be added to provide secondary access for patron and to provide back of house access to the alley. The southern-most door will be a new varnished wood door, set within a bronze frame, while the northern-most door will be a flat panel dark bronze colored metal unit. The southernmost door will be set within a dark hot rolled, pickled and oiled (HRPO) steel surround to provide durability at the rear entry. Please see renderings and drawings for additional details.



Sidewalk Patio:

A sidewalk dining space is planned for the west façade of the building. The patio will be encircled with a combination of dark bronze metal railing and planter boxes. The railing will be an open, dark bronze metal railing and will span from the second door to the southern-most bay to enclose the dining area. The patio enclosure may also feature non-permanent planter boxes. Loose tables and chairs will be set within the dining area. Please see the attached drawings and renderings for additional details.

Signage:

Signage is currently proposed to be installed on the canopy on the primary façade and a small sign will be installed near the entrance door on the alley façade as well. On the primary façade, the proposed signage location is shown on the west elevation drawing. It is proposed that the sign on the canopy on the primary façade will be a self-illuminated sign, mounted to the canopy itself.

Lighting:

New exterior sconces will be added on the primary façade. Set between each bay and on each end of the primary façade, light bronze up/down sconces will be installed to provide subtle architectural lighting to the brick piers found between each storefront bay. On the east façade a small spotlight fixture will illuminate a small logo sign.

Rooftop Addition and Patio:

Currently, there are steel trusses spanning across the full width of the front half of the roof with a wire mesh guardrail along the west façade. The top of a CMU elevator shaft sits near the NW corner of the roof. A plywood sheathed stair penthouse sits near the middle of the roof area. Behind this, a series of steel beams are installed over the roof, intended to support mechanical equipment that was never installed. All this work was intended to support an occupied roof deck for a failed restaurant project in 2004-2005. All of these materials will be removed in preparation for a new rooftop addition and terrace.

The rooftop addition will house additional seating, a bar, bathrooms, and access via elevator and stairs. The rooftop addition will set roughly in the center of the rooftop and will be set 12' back from the primary façade to create a seating area overlooking Woodward Ave. The roof of the new addition will be a glazed roof structure, aluminum faced with dark bronze finish and insulated glazing and will be angled to create a lower roof near the primary façade while angling up toward the rear façade—this will help provide space for internal systems while keeping the height of the addition manageable at the more visible west side. Because of these design features, the rooftop addition will be minimally visible from across the street—please see attached sightline studies. The new rooftop addition will be clad in a dark bronze rainscreen material.

The 12' setback will create space for a small rooftop patio which will be shielded from view by the aforementioned parapet (see Masonry section, above). The penthouse addition will feature a full width glazed sliding operable storefront system on the west façade and will provide indoor/outdoor connection between the dining space and the patio.

The existing CMU elevator shaft will be reused for this project and clad in a dark bronze rainscreen siding. Two new egress stairs will be added to the north and south facades as shown in the attached drawings. All mechanical equipment will be located behind the rooftop addition near the alley side of the roof.

The items listed above provide a synopsis of the proposed scope of work for the rehabilitation of the building. Further detail is provided in the attached drawings and photos. Please contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

Kraemer Design Group, LLC



Brian Rebain, RA NCARB
Principal

