

STAFF REPORT: 05/08/2024 MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC20204-00166
ADDRESS: 150 STATE
HISTORIC DISTRICT: CAPITOL PARK
APPLICANT: JAMES FIDLER/DOWNTOWN DETROIT PARTNERSHIP
OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT, GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 4/20/2024
DATE OF STAFF VISIT: 4/22/2024

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

SCOPE OF WORK: REHABILITATE PARK

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project area is a triangular-shaped park that is bound by State Street to the south, Grand River Avenue to the north, Griswold to the east, and a vacated portion of Shelby Steet to the west. Currently, the northern portion of the park is dominated by hardscape consisting of concrete and brick pavers. Trees in cast stone planters dot this portion of the park. The southern portion of the park is bound by a dog play area which is enclosed by 5'-0" high aluminum fencing and displays artificial turf. A 3,750sf lawn area is located directly adjacent to the dog park. Perennial gardens in cast stone planters line the eastern edge of the park. A bronze sculpture of Stevens T. Mason, Michigan's first governor, which sits on its original masonry pedestal and a non-historic masonry base/burial vault is in the northernmost perennial garden planter. A Michigan State Historical Marker entitled "Finney Barn", which was installed in the park in 1980, is present within the park's southeasternmost planter. The planter to the east of the dog park includes a masonry and bronze marker entitled "The First Capitol Building in Michigan" which was installed within the park in 1926. Non-historic, metal light posts, benches trash receptacles, and utility cabinets are present throughout. Two 8'-0" high digital information signs/kiosks have recently been installed within the park without HDC approval.



Capitol Park, facing northeast. Staff photo taken 4/22/2024



Capitol Park, facing southwest. Staff photo taken 4/22/2024

PROPOSAL

With the current proposal, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval to rehabilitate the park per the submission to include the following:

- Dog Park
 - Expand existing dog park area by 25%/400sf
 - Add trees, engineered wood fibers, boulders, and interactive elements (not specified)
 - Add 5"-high fencing (style and material not specified)
- Expand existing lawn space size by 30%
- Install trees and landscaped planters (concrete with steel edging)
- Install hardscape to include resin bound aggregate paving, gravel, decorative concrete
- Install wood benches, bike racks, tables and chairs, waste receptacles, catenary/overhead lighting, and 8'-10" x 18'-5" moveable timber platform/bench
- Erect a 12'-8" high food and beverage kiosk. The kiosk will include a hexagonal shaped, 204sf prefabricated structure. Exterior walls will be painted dark grey to black per the applicant. Steel cables which will accommodate climbing vines and a screen that is composed of wood, glue laminated fins will be affixed to the structure's exterior walls.
- Stevens T. Mason monument
 - Move bronze statue to grade and install at a central location within the park
 - Retain existing historic masonry base and non-historic masonry pedestal/burial vault in place. A new 13'-11 1/2" – high obelisk will be installed atop the existing base.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Capitol Park Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1999. The National Register nomination lists the district's period of significance as 1875-1945.
- The Capitol Park Historic District was designated as a local historic district in 2012. Both the National Register nomination and the Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board's (HDAB) report for the district indicate that the park and the Stevens T. Mason monument are contributing to the district, ie. significant historic elements
- Per the HDAB, a courthouse building was erected at the site in 1823
- When Michigan became a state in 1837, the courthouse was repurposed to serve as the state capitol building and functioned as such until 1847, when Lansing became the state's capitol
- The building was then used as a public school, known as the Capitol Union School. The building subsequently received a renovation, to include the erection of a Gothic Revival style front addition, so that it might serve as the Detroit High School. In 1893, the building was destroyed by fire. At that point, the land was converted to a public recreation space which was named Capitol Park. Two years after the fire, multiple streetcars looped around the new park with large boarding platforms constructed on Griswold and Shelby streets.
- In 1905, the remains of Michigan's first governor, Stevens T. Mason, were interred in Capitol Park. Circa 1908, a statue of Mason by sculptor Albert Weinert was erected over the grave site.
- In 1955, the Department of Street Railways (DSR) constructed the \$280,000 Capitol Park Station, which by then had become a major bus transfer station, at the north end of the park. This resulted in the relocation of Stevens T. Mason's tomb and monument to the south end of the park. As a result of this project, the original landscaping, hardscaping, and fountain were removed. The original masonry semicircular platform, balustrade/exedra, and integrated light posts at the base of the Mason state were also removed by this time (see below photos on pages 12 & 13 for the park's appearance at that time)
- The DSR station was demolished in 1979. However, the area around the park continued to be used as a bus terminal.
- In 2001 the Capitol Park Transit Center was located within the park. The park hosted the transit center until the opening of the nearby Rosa Parks Transit Center in July 2009
- In 2009-2010, the park underwent a \$1.1 million renovation, to include a plan for the relocation of the Mason monument and grave to its current location. However, the burial vault was not where earlier plans indicated and crews searched for four days before it was located on June 29, 2010. It was believed that the grave was moved from its 1905 location in 1955, when the DSR bus station was erected within the park. In October 2010, the Mason remains were reburied in the monument's newly built vault in the pedestal which sits beneath the original bronze statue and masonry base (see the below photo on page 15).
- In addition to the Mason monument, the following objects were located in the park in 2010:
 - A masonry and bronze marker entitled "The First Capitol Building in Michigan" which was installed within the park in 1926
 - Michigan State Historical Marker entitled "Michigan's First Capitol" and installed in the park in 2010
 - Michigan State Historical Marker entitled "Capitol Union School" and installed in the park in 2010
 - Michigan State Historical Marker entitled "Finney Barn" and erected installed in the park in 1980
 - Metal sculpture (see below). The sculpture was present in the park by 2007, however, the original date of installation and the name of artist unknown.
 - A scale model of Michigan's first capitol building installed in the park sometime between 2007 and 2009

- In 2016, the current applicant/the Downtown Detroit Partnership (DDP) presented a proposal to the HDC for the initial phase of their rehabilitation of the park, to include the establishment of the current dog activity area, lawn, and the addition of new landscaping. The Commission approved the proposal with the following conditions:
 - The existing modern sculpture which is located in the westernmost planter that is proposed for removal shall be re-installed within the park
 - Both the Michigan State Historical Markers entitled “Michigan’s First Capitol” and “Capitol Union School” shall be retained and reinstalled within the park

Staff notes that the Michigan State Historical Markers entitled “Michigan’s First Capitol” and “Capitol Union School” in addition to the modern sculpture were not reinstalled in the park/are not currently extant with the park per the 2016 COA’s conditions. Also, the scale model of Michigan’s first capitol building which was installed sometime between 2007 and 2009 is not currently extant within the park. However, note that all of these objects were installed within the park relatively recently, after the district’s period of significance, and were not contributing elements to the district. If an application was submitted to the Commission for the removal of these objects, staff would not object to the proposal as they are not distinctive character defining features of the park and/or the district and their removal would therefore meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation.

- In 2017, the current applicant/the DDP gave a presentation to the Commission re: their long-term rehabilitation plans for the park for review and comment
- The current applicant/the DDP submitted two subsequent applications to the Commission for the installation of new amenities/features within the park (in 2018 and 2019). The Commission approved both applications.
- Major alterations to the park in 1955, ca. 1979, ca. 2001, and 2009 resulted in the removal of the park’s historic fabric with the exception of the bronze Mason statue and limestone pedestal, installed in the park in 1908, and the masonry and bronze marker entitled “The First Capitol Building in Michigan” which was installed in the park in 1926. Note that both objects have been moved from their original locations.
- The Stevens T. Mason monument includes a bronze statue and limestone pedestal, both dating from 1908, and a masonry base/burial vault, which dates from 2010. The remains of Stevens T. Mason were interred within the masonry vase/burial vault in 2010 (see below photo on page 15). As stated above, the historic statue and masonry base has been moved at least two times since the date of the monument’s original construction. Also, the original balustrade/exedra and light posts had been removed from the monument by 1955. Despite the relocations and removal the original balustrade, the district’s historic designation report has identified the monument as a contributing element to the district.
- As noted above, the current application proposes to separate the historic bronze statue from its original base and install it at a new location, at grade, within the park. A new obelisk will be installed atop the monument’s historic/original base and contemporary burial vault. The obelisk will depict a “section and geological history of the park grounds including carbonized ash layers preserved within the soil from the fire of 1893 that destroyed the Capitol Union Schoolhouse.”
- The applicant’s submission states that the current statue of Mason is “disconnected from contemporary life” due to its elevated/lofty positioning atop its base. They further note that “it has been observed anecdotally that for whatever reason, people seem to want to gather around Stevens T, get closer to him... Given the 1st governor’s propensity for democracy and human rights, it seems fitting that his final move is to be more approachable and engaging with the people in the park.” Hence the proposed reinstallation of the statue at grade so that park visitors might directly interact/engage with the object.

- Staff acknowledges that communities across the United States are confronting the nation’s history and its legacy of racism and sexism. As a result, associated efforts to remove, alter, or reinterpret monuments which might remain as tangible symbols of/serve to reinforce an oppressive practice or ideology and/or misrepresent history are increasingly butting up against historic preservation laws/existing statutory requirements to retain and preserve such monuments as historic objects.
- Staff also acknowledges that the elevation of a statue can serve to disconnect the public from the very history the monument is meant to represent. With the proposed relocation of the statue to grade, the applicant seeks to highlight Mason’s “propensity for democracy and human rights.” Also, the proposed new obelisk installation would reorient the monument towards the park’s significance as the site of Michigan’s original capitol building. While staff does appreciate the applicant’s thoughtfulness around this matter, we do note that the following:
 - The original statue and limestone base were designed and by sculptor Albert Weinert to be located in the park as a single installation/piece in 1908.
 - The HDAB designation report has determined that the historic monument as discrete object/a whole is a Contributing feature of the district. Staff does not recommend the dismantling of this historic object/the statue from its original base and/or the installation of a new obelisk in its place as it will result in a false sense of historic development within the park and therefore does not meet the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, Standard # 3 which states the following:
 - *Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.*
 - A past relocation of the monument has already resulted in the removal of significant character-defining features of the monument to include the original balustrade/exedra and light posts. The separation of the statue and its original base would further contribute to a diminution of features that characterize the monument. This does not meet the Secretary of Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, Standard # 2 which states the following:
 - *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.*
 - Although the 2010 pedestal is not historic-age, it does contain the Stevens T. Mason’s remains. When originally erected, the monument was meant to mark the location of Mason’s grave. It is believed that the work undertaken within the park in 1955, to include the relocation of the monument, resulted in the separation of the grave from the monument. The erection of the current base/vault in 2010 and the reinternment of Mason’s remains within appears to be an effort to permanently reestablish the historic relationship between the grave and the monument. The proposed statue relocation would sever that historic relationship.
- The current location of the statue atop its historic base allows for a better visibility within the park. Also, the elevation of the statue protects it from damage, vandalism, weather, and any potential accidental collision with pedestrians.
- As noted, it is staff’s opinion that the Mason monument’s bronze statue and original 1908 granite pedestal should remain conjoined as a single object and Mason’s remains should be retained as an integral element of the monument/grave site. However, staff would not object to the relocation of the monument (to include the statue, the 1908 limestone base, and Manson’s remains) within the park as it has been moved a number of times throughout its history. Staff also would support

the erection of the proposed obelisk within the park as long as it is not installed atop the base of the Mason monument

- Staff recently visited the site to document current conditions and noted that two, 8'-0" high digital information kiosks have been installed within the park (see photos on page 17). A review of HDC files indicated that an application for the work was never submitted to the HDC. Staff did ask the applicant if he wished to address these kiosks in the current application. However, staff has yet to receive a response to her inquiry as of the date of this report's completion.



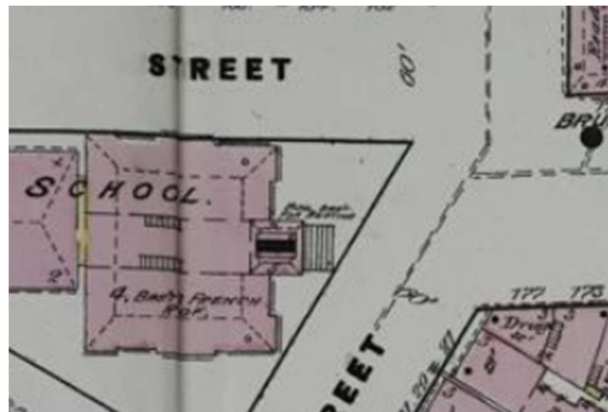
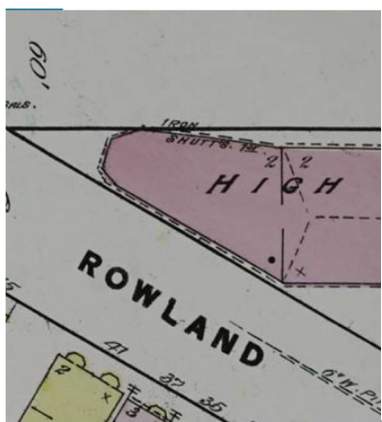
The former Capitol Building, ca. 186. Facing northwest



The former Capitol Building after it was repurposed for use as the Capitol Union School, ca. 1870



The former Capitol Building after it was heavily altered for use as the Detroit Highschool. Ca. 1875. It is noted that the following was handwritten on the back of this photo "Old Detroit high school at head of Griswold Street, where Capitol Park is now located. Formerly the state capitol building but remodeled for school purposes."



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Map shows the footprint of the Detroit High School in 1884 before it burned down.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Showing footprint of Capitol Park, 1897. The circle indicates the location of a fountain



Capitol Park, ca. 1900, prior to the installation of the Mason monument, Facing southwest



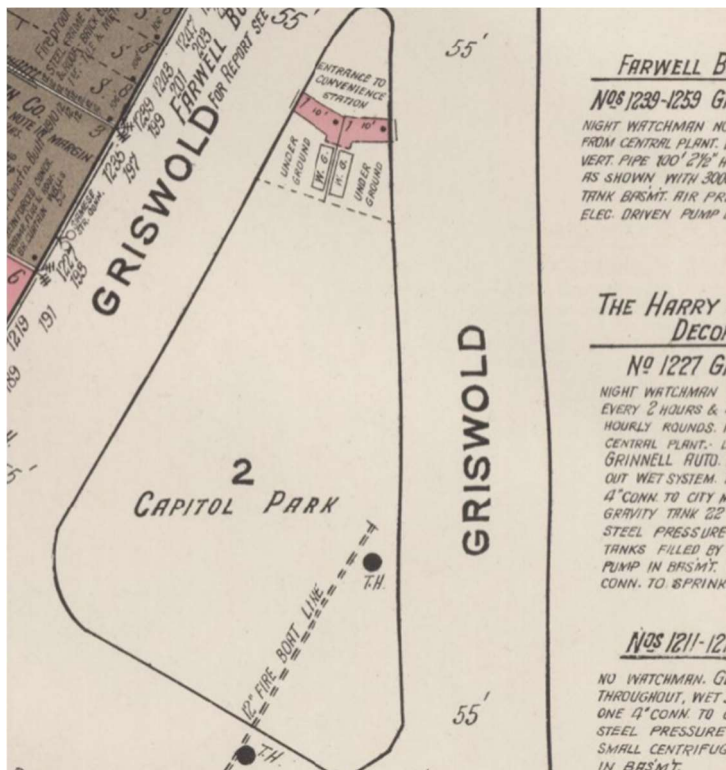
Photo of the Mason monument, showing original masonry floor, balustrade/exedra, and light fixtures. These framing elements were removed ca. 1955 when the monument was moved from its original location at the north end of the park to the south end of the park to accomodation the location of a new bus station within the park



Capitol Park, ca. 1915. Facing southwest. Note that the Mason monument is located in the north portion of the park



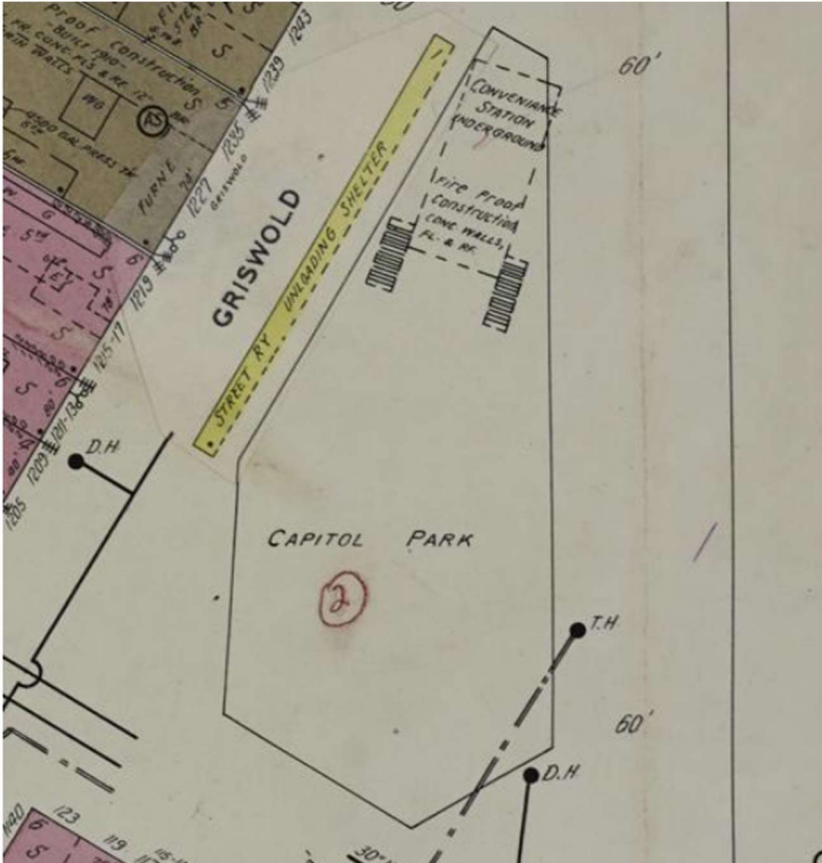
Capitol Park, ca. 1915. Facing northwest. Note that the Mason monument is located in the north portion of the park



Sanborn Fire Insurance map, showing footprint of Capitol Park in 1921. The structure at the north edge of the park is listed as a “comfort station”



Capitol Park, ca. 1935. Facing northwest



Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Showing footprint of Capitol Park in 1950



Capitol Park, ca. 1945. Facing north



Capitol Park, 1960s, after location of the new DSR station within the park, facing southwest.



Capitol Park, 1960s, after location of the new DSR station within the park. Facing southeast.



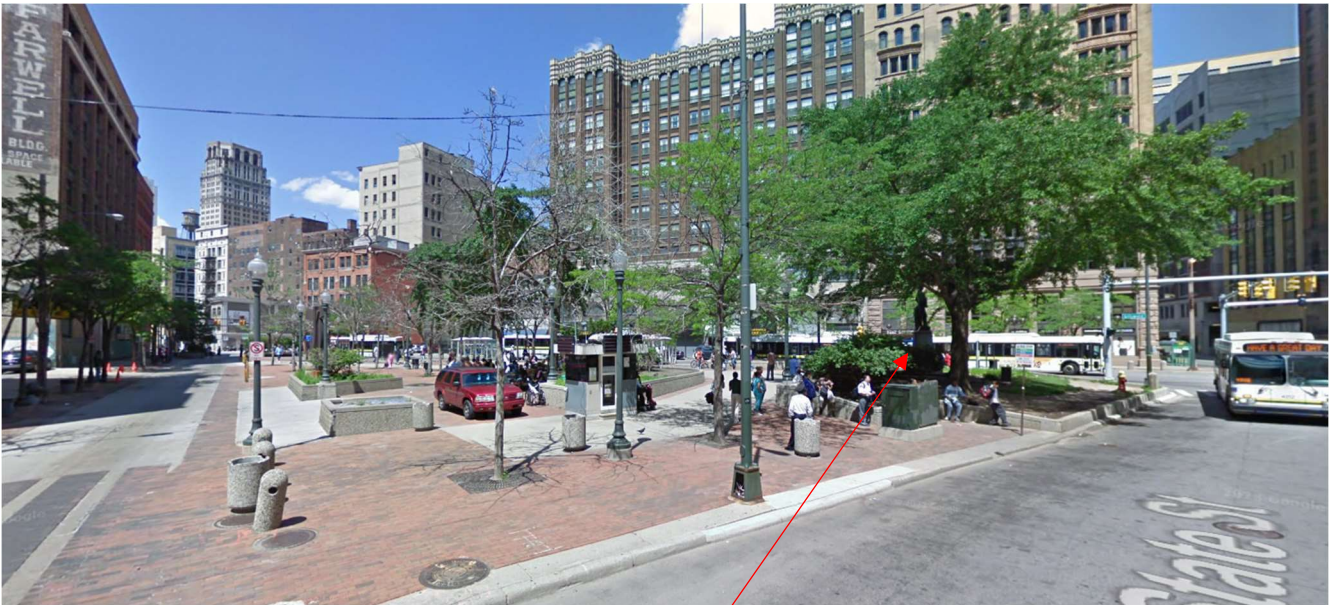
Capitol Park, 1960s, after location of the new DSR station within the park. Facing north. Note that the Mason monument is now located in the southeast corner of the park and the original floor, balustrade/exedra and light posts are not extant, Also the park's original fountain and the pool have been removed. Finally, much of the original landscaping has been removed.



Capitol Park, 2007. Google Streetview, facing west



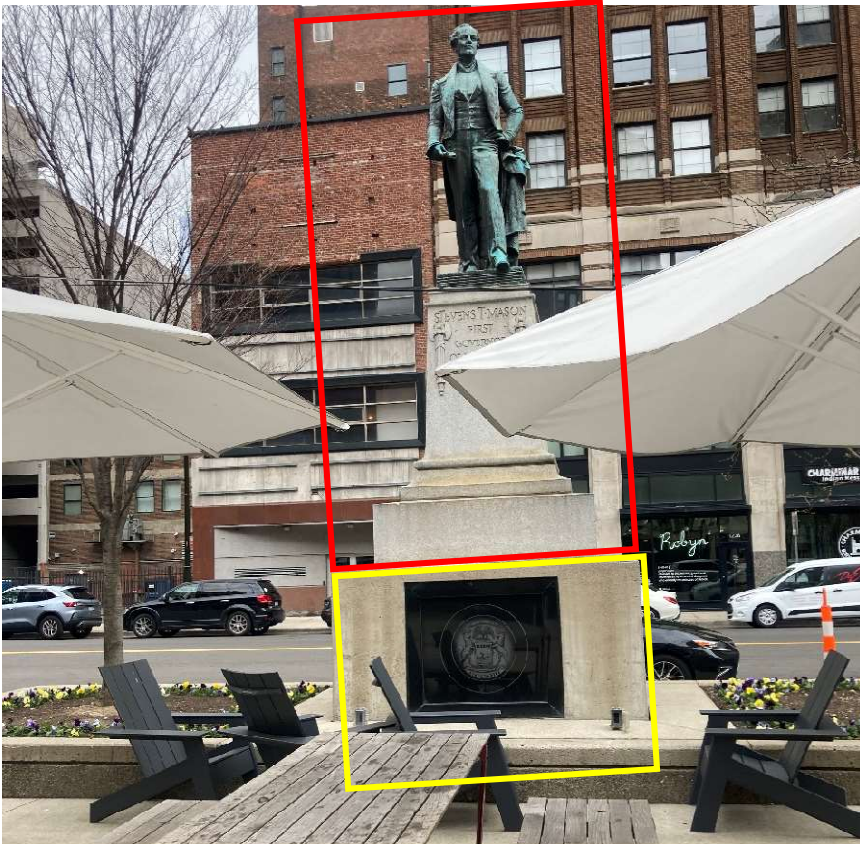
Capitol Park, 2009. Google Streetview, facing southwest



Capitol Park, 2009. Google Streetview, facing northeast. Note location of Mason monument



Capitol Park, 2010, Showing Mason's interment into newly installed pedestal/burial vault. Note that the monument has been moved to its current location in this photo



Mason monument, current appearance. Staff photo taken on 4/22/2024. The red outline indicates the original/1908 portion of the monument. The area outlined in yellow is the pedestal/vault that was installed in 2010 and currently houses Mason's remains.



Masonry and bronze marker entitled "The First Capitol Building in Michigan" which was installed within the park in 1926. Staff photo taken on 4/22/2024



Electronic kiosk #1, installed within without HDC approval, facing north. Staff photo taken on 4/22/2024



Electronic kiosk #2, installed within without HDC approval, facing northwest. Staff photo taken on 4/22/2024

ISSUES

- The historic Stevens T. Mason monument, to include its original bronze statue and limestone base, is a contributing element to the district as a discrete/single object and was originally erected to mark Mason's grave. The proposed dismantling of this historic object/the statue from its original base, the resulting disconnection from Mason's remains, and the installation of a new obelisk on the base will result in a false sense of historic development within the park and will contribute to a diminution of features that characterize the monument. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission deny this work.

- The proposal does not speak to the masonry and bronze marker entitled “The First Capitol Building in Michigan” which was installed within the park in 1926. As the object is historic age and was location in the park within the period of significance, it is staff’s opinion that it is a distinctive, character-defining feature of the park which must be retained

RECOMMENATION

Recommendation # 1 - Section 21-2-73, DENIAL - Relocate Stevens T, Mason Statue and install an obelisk on the monument’s base

The historic Stevens T. Mason monument, to include its original bronze statue and limestone base, is a contributing element to the district as a discrete/single object and was originally erected to mark Mason’s grave. The proposed dismantling of this historic object/the statue from its original base, the resulting disconnection from Mason’s remains, and the installation of a new obelisk on the base remains will result in a false sense of historic development within the park and will contribute to a diminution of features that characterize the monument. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for this work item because it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular, Standards# 2 and 3:

#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.

&

#3) Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

Recommendation # 2 - Section 21-2-73, CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS (COA) – Remaining scope

It is staff’s opinion that the proposed remaining scope is generally appropriate to the property’s historic character. Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the remaining work items because they meet the Secretary of the Interior’s Standard’s for Rehabilitation and conform to the district’s Elements of Design. However, staff does recommend that the COA be issued with the following conditions:

- The applicant shall provide the final planting plan, construction drawings for the food and beverage kiosk, and design for the dog park fencing to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the project’s permit.
- The masonry and bronze marker entitled “The First Capitol Building in Michigan” shall remain within the park. The applicant shall provide HDC staff with a plan which indicates the location of the marker for review and approval prior to the issuance of the project’s permit