

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: New Center Commercial Historic District

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## 2. Location

Street & number: Woodward Ave./Baltimore St. to Grand Blvd.

City or town: Detroit State: MI County: Wayne

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets    does not meet the National Register Criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

   national    statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A    B X C    D

|                                                     |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------|
| <u>Matthew D. MacArthur</u> <u>3/8/16</u>           |      |
| Signature of certifying official/Title:             | Date |
| <u>MI SHPO</u>                                      |      |
| State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government |      |

|                                                                                                     |                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| In my opinion, the property <u>  </u> meets <u>  </u> does not meet the National Register criteria. |                                                     |
|                                                                                                     |                                                     |
| Signature of commenting official:                                                                   | Date                                                |
|                                                                                                     |                                                     |
| Title :                                                                                             | State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government |

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:)

  
Signature of the Keeper

5-3-16  
Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒  
Public – Local ☐  
Public – State ☐  
Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☐  
District ☒  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing      | Noncontributing   |            |
|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| <u>14</u>         | <u>1</u>          | buildings  |
| <u>          </u> | <u>          </u> | sites      |
| <u>          </u> | <u>          </u> | structures |
| <u>          </u> | <u>          </u> | objects    |
| <u>14</u>         | <u>1</u>          | Total      |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/specialty store  
COMMERCE/restaurant  
COMMERCE/department store  
COMMERCE/financial institution  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater  
                                                            
                                                          

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/specialty store  
COMMERCE/restaurant

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commercial Style

Classical Revival

Art Deco

Moderne

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Limestone, Terra Cotta, Metal

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The New Center Commercial Historic District is a linear commercial district centered on Woodward Avenue south of its intersection with Grand Boulevard in the New Center area of Detroit. Located about three miles north of downtown and encompassing 4.1 acres, the district is approximately 700 feet long and 360 feet wide at its maximum points. The New Center Commercial Historic District contains fourteen contributing and one non-contributing building. All are of masonry construction, and there is a mix of one, two, and three-story commercial buildings. The buildings display a range of architectural styles, including Commercial Style, Neo-Classical, Art Deco, and Moderne. The buildings were constructed between the late 1880s and 1942; however, the predominant architecture and storefronts in the district date from the 1920s through the 1950s.

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#### Narrative Description

The New Center Commercial Historic District is a two-block long area straddling Woodward Avenue from the south side of Grand Boulevard to its intersection with Baltimore Street. The district is primarily flat in terrain, with its south end one block north of where Woodward

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Avenue is depressed under a large concrete overpass containing several lines of railroad tracks. The district is located one block east of the General Motors Building and Fisher and New Center Buildings National Historic Landmarks and from the General Motors Research Laboratory/Argonaut Building. The New Amsterdam and Piquette Avenue Historic Districts are both located about three blocks to the south, on the far side of the railroad track underpass.

Woodward Avenue is seven lanes wide, including parking lanes, through the center of the district. There are concrete sidewalks with small street trees on both sides. All of the buildings in the district abut the sidewalk. At the north end of the district east-west running Grand Boulevard is six lanes wide with grass and tree filled medians in the center. The two side streets intersecting the district, Milwaukee Avenue and Baltimore Street, are both two lanes wide.

The district is comprised of one-, two-, and three-story tall buildings. Two of the three-story tall buildings are located at the north end of the district, next to Grand Boulevard, creating a north anchor to the district. The third three-story tall building is located at the southwest corner of the district, at Woodward and Milwaukee. The west side of Woodward between Grand Boulevard and Milwaukee has both one- and two-story buildings between the three-story buildings at the corners. All of the buildings on this side of the street in this block have facades dating from the 1940s as buildings were either demolished or their front sections removed when Woodward was widened in 1936. All of the buildings reflect the simple Moderne style. The buildings lining the two blocks in the district on the east side of Woodward are much more varied in architectural style. The northernmost building in the north block is a three-story brick building that retains its Victorian era details such as projecting bay windows on the upper floors. The one-story buildings in the remainder of the block range from the colorful terra cotta Art Deco building at the south end, to the enamel metal panel covered buildings in the center. All of the buildings in the southern block are two stories tall and primarily Commercial style buildings with the exception of the 1916 Neo-Classical style, Albert Kahn-designed Detroit Savings Bank on the north corner. The 1914 commercial building on the south corner, designed by Varney and Winter, is the best example of Commercial style in the district. The Detroit Hardware building next to the bank is another of the older buildings in the district. It is the south half of the former Brown Block, and the parapet wall retains its original brick panel design. The buildings in the district reflect the development of the district from the late 1880s through the 1940s, including storefront modernization undertaken in the 1950s and 60s in attempts to revitalize the area.

Inventory

East Side of Woodward – South to North

**6400-02 Woodward/11-21 West Baltimore Street – 1914 – Contributing**

A building permit was issued to the Detroit architectural firm of A. C. Varney and Winter in October 1914 for construction of this two-story tall white brick commercial building located at the northeast corner of Woodward and Baltimore. The building has had numerous uses including a beer garden, restaurants, and a rifle range. Bowling alleys were installed in the second floor in 1919. New storefronts were installed in various sections of the building in 1927, 1929, 1940 and 1959. In the 1950s Wolverine Bar occupied most of the ground floor. The two-

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story tall Commercial style building is three bays wide facing Woodward and is ten bays deep along Baltimore. The building has storefronts facing both streets. It retains its original white brick column at the corner of the building where the storefront entrance is recessed. The storefronts on both sides of the building have been infilled with a mixture of painted concrete block and glass block. The large second floor window openings are separated by brick piers and are infilled with glass block above hopper windows at the bottom of the opening. Recessed brick panels are located in the wall above each window opening. The original painted metal cornice with stylized single and paired brackets runs around the building at the base of the parapet wall. The brackets are paired at the building corners, and the single brackets are aligned with the edges of the window bays. The parapet wall is capped with limestone coping. The east wall of the building is of painted brick with windows at the second floor. The north side of the building that extends beyond the neighboring buildings is of red brick with paired windows in the second floor and a concrete block addition at the first floor.

### **6408-16 Woodward – c. 1885 – Contributing**

This two-story Moderne style commercial building with its broad unified façade was possibly originally two buildings constructed prior to 1889. The footprints shown in the 1889 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* show two buildings each with two stores and wall down the center. There is evidence of this configuration at the rear of the building which shows four distinct sections. The footprint of the north half of the present building changed very little between the 1889, 1924 and 1950 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*. The footprint of the south half of the building exists as of 1924. A circa 1912 postcard from the online collection of the Detroit Historical Society shows two buildings, the northern one with projecting bay windows at the second floor. The earliest building permit found for the building is from 1926 for interior and storefront alterations. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company owned the building at least from 1935 through 1941 as evidenced by permits for another storefront alteration and for conversion of the second floor to a dance studio with marquis sign. The retail store was an artist supply store from at least 1944 when they constructed a fireproof room. In 1951 the stucco façade was replaced with a porcelain enamel metal panel upper façade and the second floor was converted to an industrial art studio. Lewis Art Supply occupied the building from at least 1940 to 1969 and likely into the 1980s. Jack Lewis moved his artist supply store to New Center in 1927 although it is not in this location as of 1930. The building is four bays wide. Presently the four first floor storefronts are boarded over with T-1-11 siding; however, an older photo shows a recessed glass and aluminum entry in the northern bay with a projecting aluminum and glass display window to the south. The two southern bays show large aluminum and glass storefronts with short masonry bases. The second floor is clad in porcelain enamel metal panels with vertical metal strips that divide the façade equally into sixteen sections. The metal strips align with the edges of the two long bands of second floor windows, as well as divide each band of windows into six sections. Backlit signage is placed between the strips above the second-floor windows. Near the north end of the building a large rectangular sign that reads “Artist Supply Lewis” spans two sections of the metal strips. Five square signs with a yellow heraldry-like lion on a light blue background alternate in every other section on the south two-thirds of the building. The metal strips and signage were likely added in the 1960s or 70s indicating that the art supply store was likely in this location until at least the 1980s. The rear of the building is of common brick and has four distinct

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sections. The northern section extends further east than the other portions and has two double-hung windows in the second floor. Both it, and the next section to the south, which also has two double-hung windows at the second floor, have remnants of gray paint and matching brick walls possibly indicating they were one building at one time. The brick wall in the next section south is slightly darker. At the second floor there are two arched-top bricked-in window openings and a boarded over door opening. A tall wood fence blocks the first floor of these three sections of the building from view. The southern section has remnants of plaster on the brick walls. A door opening at the second floor is boarded closed. There are no openings at the first floor.

### **6420-26 Woodward – c. 1885 – Contributing**

A two-story Commercial style building that was possibly constructed prior to 1889 as evidenced by the building footprint on the various *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* and the rear window openings which are typical from that time period. The existing upper façade appears to date from the 1910s or 1920s. A c. 1912 postcard from the on-line collection of the Detroit Historical Society shows six windows in the second story and a theater in the south half of the building. The earliest existing permit was issued to G. E. Mitchell in 1917 for a new storefront and to level the inclined floor from the previous use as a theater. Permits to alter the storefront were issued in 1929, 1948, and 1957. According to the city directories and building permits, a tailor shop was located on the second floor from 1922 until at least 1972. In 1957 part or all of the first floor was converted from a retail store to a bar, and the existing north storefront reflects this change. The building is three bays wide, and the center bay is narrow compared to the outer ones. The entire first floor is clad in square marble tiles up to the bottom of the second-floor sills. The tile has been turned on the diagonal on the vertical piers separating the bays. The recessed northern storefront retains its 1957 appearance and is clad in 1950s style horizontal stone and has glass block windows. The second floor of the building is faced in yellow brick. The outside bays each have a wide Chicago style window, a single large light flanked by double-hung window with transoms across the top. The window opening matches the width of the storefront below. The center bay is narrower and contains one double-hung window. Awnings run across the top of all the window openings. The parapet wall has a wide recessed brick panel across the top of the building. The top of the wall has a soldier brick course below a narrow limestone coping. The rear of the building is red brick with a one-story addition extending toward the back. The shallow arch-top window openings at the second floor have been infilled with glass block.

### **6432 Woodward – Detroit Hardware – c. 1885 – Contributing**

A two-story brick commercial building that once formed the south half of the Brown Block. The north half was demolished for the Detroit Savings Bank in 1916 and the original Italianate style arched second-floor windows were modified sometime after 1916. A c. 1912 postcard from the online collection of the Detroit Historical Society shows a four-bay wide, two-story brick Italianate building with a metal cornice and pediment on the building. The name and date on the pediment are difficult to read. Each bay of the building contained a simple wood storefront at the first floor and two double-hung arch-top windows at the second floor. The brick parapet wall in the postcard matches the existing building with two rows of corbelled brick at the base and

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brick panels above. The earliest building permit is from 1917 for a new frame and glass storefront. Subsequent storefront and interior alterations occurred in 1918, 1919, 1922, and 1930. In 1933 Detroit Hardware Company, which was founded in 1924, moved into the building and made storefront and interior alterations. Prior to that the city directories list a restaurant and shoe repair in the two storefronts. The most recent permit is from 1976 when the synthetic rubble masonry-look cladding was likely added to the south storefront. The north storefront is an aluminum-framed glass storefront with a tile base. A large fabric awning extends across the entire storefront opening. The second floor is of painted brick and has a large window opening with transom in each half of the building. A brick dentil and corbel band runs across the top of each bay. More corbeled brick bands run along the parapet wall, which also has a band of sunken panels. The rear of the building has a deep one-story concrete block addition with two door openings. The two-story back part of the building is painted brick with a door and five window openings.

### **6438 Woodward – Detroit Savings Bank – 1916, 1941 – Contributing**

The two-story tall Neo-Classical style Detroit Savings Bank at the southeast corner of Woodward and Milwaukee avenues was designed by noted Detroit architect Albert Kahn; the third branch of the bank, established in 1909, it is one of several of the bank's buildings with an identical front around the city. The bank acquired the property in 1914 and in July 1915 the directors approved Kahn's plans for the structure (strangely, the Kahn job list, while listing nine buildings designed for the bank, including others with identical fronts, does not list this one). A building permit was issued April 4, 1916, for the building with estimated \$18,000 cost, and the new bank opened later that year (Woodford, 134, citing Directors Minutes, 12/8/1908, 4/20/1909, 4/7/1914, 7/16/1915). The building remained a bank branch until at least 1957. The west and north façade walls are clad in smooth limestone, the rear and south sides in red brick. The front façade has a two-story tall recessed entrance portico containing two massive fluted Doric columns and a central entrance door framed by stone. The recessed façade, which originally contained metal framed windows, has been covered over with metal siding. Outlining the portico opening are broad carved bands displaying alternating medallions and key fretwork. "Detroit Savings Bank" is engraved across the top of the wall. A simplified stone entablature runs around the building at the base of the parapet wall. The north façade facing Milwaukee has nine two-story tall narrow openings separated by Doric piers. Eight of the openings contain metal frame windows at the first floor; the upper openings have been covered with metal siding. The center opening contains an entrance door with metal siding above. A band with engraved medallions runs across the top of the openings and the simplified stone entablature marks the base of the parapet wall. The rear elevation abuts the alley and is of dark red brick except for the north edge where the limestone cladding turns the corner. A limestone entablature tops the wall at the same level as the north façade. There is a single opening at the first and second floors. The south elevation is visible where it rises above the abutting building. It is of red brick and void of openings.

### **6500 Woodward – Liggett Drug Store - 1929 – Contributing**

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The one-story Art Deco style commercial building at the northeast corner of Woodward and Milwaukee avenues was begun in September 1929 for the A. M. Campau Realty Company. It was designed by Detroit architects O'Dell and Diehl and was constructed by H. G. Christman-Burke (*Michigan Contractor & Builder*, Aug. 17, 1929). The new building replaced older two-story buildings which housed a drug store, physicians and dentist offices as early as 1910. A branch of the Liggett Drug Store moved into the building in 1927 and remained a tenant in the new building through at least 1940. The building has a brightly colored terra cotta façade and red tile hip roof along the facades making it unique in the district. Storefront remodeling began within a year of construction. In 1937 a Thom Mc Ann shoe store moved into one of the storefronts, replacing the Melville Shoe Company that had altered the storefront in 1935. The Woodward façade has four storefronts; three are aluminum and glass, one is wood and glass. The storefront openings are framed with tan colored terra cotta bands. The wall above has orange, green, tan and black terra cotta tiles creating an elaborate multi-colored chevron pattern across the façade. The top of the wall has a tan dentil molding with a hipped red clay Spanish tile roof above. The south elevation facing Milwaukee continues the storefront in one small section, while the remainder of the wall has been infilled with exterior insulating finishing system panels between tan terra cotta piers. The top of the wall matches the front façade. The façade decoration wraps around the first ten feet of the rear of the building. The remainder of the rear wall is of painted brick and the openings have all been bricked in.

#### **6520 Woodward – 1929 – Neisner Brothers – Contributing**

The one-story brick building was begun in January 1929 for A. M. Campau Realty. It was constructed by H. G. Christman-Burke for Neisner Brothers of Rochester, New York (*Michigan Contractor & Builder*, Jan. 5, 1929). Neisner Brothers were the first tenants and were in the building in the 1930, 1940 and 1957 city directories. The only permits for exterior alterations are from 1979 for the Kinney Shoe Corporation. The building has simplified classical detailing. The aluminum framed glass storefronts have tile bases. The storefront opening is framed in limestone and there is a limestone panel capped by a simple entablature above the transom line. The parapet wall has five limestone-framed brick panels separated by brick piers which project above the wall and are capped with decorative limestone. The rear of the building extends to the alley and the rear and side walls are of red brick without any openings.

#### **6532-34 Woodward – Sanders Confectionery – 1928 – Non-Contributing**

In June 1928 a permit was issued to Fred Sanders to construct a brick store and loft building. Sanders had opened their first branch in the district at 6550 Woodward in 1919 but moved to this building in 1928. The storefront was remodeled in 1936 by Edwin Sanders. It remained a Sanders confectionary store until at least 1957. In 1967 offices were installed in the interior and the storefront was altered for a jewelry store. More exterior alterations were completed in 1985. The one-story commercial building has a metal and glass storefront. Three blind arches rise above the storefront into the marble-clad upper facade. The rear wall of the building is of painted concrete block and has one garage door opening.

#### **6538-40 Woodward – Center Theater – c. 1900 – Contributing**

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This building was constructed sometime after 1897. The earliest permit is one from 1913 for a rear one-story addition. In 1930 it contained a restaurant. In 1933 one of the stores was converted into the Center Theater and a new marquis sign was installed in 1936. In 1940 the building housed Rose Jewelers and the Center Theater. In 1952 it was converted back to two stores. The front of the south storefront housing Rose Jewelers was clad in marble in 1951. In 1957 the building contained Rose Jewelers (south side) and a branch of Winkelman's Department store (north side). It is likely that the existing storefronts are from the 1950s renovations. The one-story building has two aluminum-framed glass storefronts with tile bases. The north storefront has granite cladding on the edges of the storefront. The upper part of the wall is clad in enameled metal panels that now have a stucco-like coating. The rear of the building is of red brick with no openings.

### **6550-68 Woodward – c. 1896 – Contributing**

This three-story brick commercial building at the southeast corner of Woodward and East Grand Boulevard is one of the two oldest buildings in the district that retains its original Victorian era features. It does not appear in the 1888 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, but it is on the 1897 map, which correlates with its first listing in the 1897 city directory. At that time the building contained Decker Drugs, a milliner, and a grocer as ground-floor tenants. As two storefronts are listed as vacant it is likely the building was newly constructed. All of the city directories except 1930 list a drugstore in the corner storefront. A c. 1910 postcard from the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, shows that the building originally had low, square-plan corner towers and a pediment rising above the center of the Woodward elevation, with low pent roofs between. The towers and pediment are still there in a c. 1927 photograph but had been removed by the time of a 1950 photograph, both from the online collection of the Detroit Historical Society. A three-story tall addition containing a stair and storefront were added to the east end of the building prior to the 1921 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*. The earliest building permit is from 1918 for storefront alterations. In June 1930 a permit was issued to Geo. F. McMahon for a brick addition to the building. Remnants from the original building include six projecting stacked wood bay windows at the second and third floors and the decorative brick panels in the parapet wall. The north corner storefront has an angled entrance and a wood framed glass storefront on a wood base. The storefront wraps around the corner to the north elevation facing East Grand Boulevard. The other Woodward-facing storefronts are aluminum-framed glass storefronts on wood bases. The upper two floors have five projecting three-sided wood bays containing double-hung windows. In each decorative wood spandrel panels separate the second and third-floor windows. Between the bays windows are single double-hung at the second and third floors. The parapet wall has a small cornice at the base and raised brick creating decorative "panels" below a small metal cornice. The first floor of the north elevation has applied wood trim and panels to resemble storefronts. The east end addition has two single doors at the first floor. The second and third floors have regularly spaced double-hung windows with one projecting two-story wood bay window matching the front façade. The decorative parapet wall continues about halfway across the north elevation, while the remainder of the parapet is plain painted brick. The east end addition has a column of one-over-one windows in the stairway and a pair of one-over-one windows at the second and third floors at the very east end. The majority

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of the rear of the building is not visible due to adjacent construction but the top two floors of the northeast corner is a painted brick wall with no openings. A penthouse extends above the main roofline. The main rear wall of the building has boarded arch-top window openings in the third floor.

West Side of Woodward – South to North

**6501 Woodward – Dime Savings Bank – 1915, 1941 new façade – Contributing**

Three-story tall commercial building at the northwest corner of Woodward and Baltimore. In September 1915 Dime Savings Bank was issued a permit to construct a three-story building. In 1920 the Home Savings Bank was issued a permit to convert the building into banking offices. In 1941 to accommodate the widening of Woodward Avenue a permit was issued to Pasadena Realty Company to reduce the depth of the building by removing the front section. The enameled metal panels cladding the first floor appear in a c. 1950 photograph from the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, but may have been installed as part of alterations from a 1951 building permit. Further alterations were undertaken in 1969. The buff brick building is simple in detail on the façade. The first floor is clad in enameled metal panels up to the bottom of the second-floor window sills. The wood framed glass storefronts have metal panel bases. The five second-floor windows have limestone sills and are spaced equally across the façade. The openings each contain paired narrow windows, with transoms, that are separated by a thick mullion. A limestone band runs across the sill line of all seven third-floor windows, which are wood one-over-one double-hung. A simple terra cotta cornice runs across the wall at the base of the parapet, which is capped with limestone coping. The south elevation facing Milwaukee is slightly more decorative than the façade. The storefront wraps around for one bay at the first floor. The remainder of the first floor is faced in enameled metal panels to the bottom of the second-floor window sills. Where a panel is falling off limestone can be seen underneath. There are two doors toward the west end of the first floor. Four second-floor windows have decorative terra cotta surrounds, and the wood window configuration matches the front. A decorative terra cotta band runs below the limestone sills of the four third-floor windows. The wood double-hung windows have raised brick surrounds creating a decorative frame similar to the terra cotta surrounds of the second-floor windows. The window openings in the east bay as well as a two-story opening in the west bay are infilled with glass block. A simple terra cotta cornice matching the façade runs across the base of the parapet wall, which is capped with limestone. The upper floors of the north wall are recessed in the center of the building to create a lightwell. Double-hung windows are located around the lightwell although most are boarded. The wall surface is stucco-covered brick. The rear elevation is painted red brick. There are two doors at the first floor. The second and third-floor windows have shallow arch-top openings with one-over-one windows.

**6513-29 Woodward – 1941 – Contributing**

One-story Moderne commercial building constructed in 1941 after the widening of Woodward Avenue. The building was constructed with six retail spaces, one of which contained a restaurant. A c. 1950 photograph from the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library

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shows a six-storefront wide building with a tall upper façade above the storefronts faced in enameled metal paneling, with the upper façade of the third storefront from the north (near the façade's center – the three southern storefronts each narrower than the northern two) recessed back but also taller (as it remains today). Storefront remodeling occurred in some of the spaces in 1943 and 1949. In 1966 part of the building was converted from retail to offices. Present-day paint colors and storefronts make the building appear to be three separate buildings. The southern third of the building has aluminum-framed storefronts on a wood base. The facade above the storefront has been covered in painted vertical wood siding. The north half of the central third of the building is slightly recessed with a taller parapet wall. The storefronts are not occupied and are hidden behind metal roll-down doors. The upper part of the wall has enameled metal panels capped by a narrow ornamental band that is decorated with concave "fluting." The north third of the building is wider than the other two sections. The aluminum-frame storefronts are on bases covered with enameled metal panels. The wall above the storefronts is clad in enameled metal panels and is capped by a narrow ornamental band that is decorated with concave "fluting." The rear of the building is buff brick, although part has been painted. Window and door openings are regularly spaced across the rear wall.

**6531-35 Woodward – Norwood Theater/Sanders Confectionary – 1915, 1941, 1952, 1966 – Contributing**

Originally constructed in 1915 and designed by Henry Joy, the Norwood Theater received a new façade in 1941 as a result of the widening of Woodward. A c. 1950 streetscape photo from the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library shows the front and part of the sides clad in enameled metal panels, with a tall parapet, a vertical sign on the roof reading "NORWOOD," and a marquis above the entrance in the north end of the storefront. In 1952 the use was changed from a theater to two retail stores. In 1966 Fred Sanders received a permit to alter the front of the building and open a store and restaurant in the entire space, indicating a move of the Sanders confectionary from their location across Woodward. The present front appears to date largely from this renovation. The building is two stories tall. The storefront has three concrete arches across the center of the façade, with a center entrance flanked by a display window on each side and an additional display window each side beyond the concrete arch area. The upper floor is covered in painted enameled metal panels and has brick vertical edges. The enameled metal panels continue part way around the side walls, which step down toward the rear of the building. The rear wall is a painted brick wall devoid of openings.

**6541-49 Woodward – 1941 – Contributing**

Construction on this building began in September 1941 by Victor Bressler for stores. The exterior was altered in 1966 and 1987. In a c. 1950 streetscape photograph from the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library the upper façade is all one height and covered in the existing enameled metal panels. The storefronts appear to be of equal width and are aluminum and glass. Presently the facade is broken into three storefronts of unequal widths. The southern aluminum-framed glass storefront is widest. It has a recessed central entrance and the base and surrounds are metal panels. A metal roll-down door covers the transom area. The upper façade is slightly taller than the section to the north and is of painted brick and concrete block. The

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center storefront is the narrowest; it and the northern storefront each have a central entrance, metal frames and metal roll-down doors. The upper façade over both storefronts is clad in enameled metal panels with a limestone coping at the top of the wall. The wall above the north storefront has a large metal sign. The rear of the building is painted brick with two door openings and three window openings.

### 6565 Woodward – F. W. Woolworth Store – 1940 – Contributing

A permit was issued in April 1940 to Edith Henry Barbour and the Detroit Trust Company for a store building with an estimated \$179,000 cost. Built to house an F. W. Woolworth store, the building replaced the Henry Block demolished for the widening of Woodward. The building was designed by architects Hyde and Williams and constructed by the Barton-Malow Company, those firms designed and built a large expansion of the downtown store later that year. The two-story Moderne commercial building at the southwest corner of Woodward and West Grand Boulevard is clad in limestone. Varying roof heights create a geometrically interesting building. A square-plan corner tower sits back slightly from the Woodward facade emphasizing the main entrance in the storefront below. The tower is decorated with raised decorative blocks in a column near the edge. An original flagpole extends from the northeast corner of the tower. The building was constructed with two retail areas. The southern aluminum and glass storefront has a recessed central entrance. The limestone clad wall has been painted and extends up in front of the slightly recessed second-floor wall. The north two-thirds of the building has a large aluminum and glass storefront with recessed entrance doors at the south and north ends. The limestone-clad wall extends to the base of a recessed strip of low, wood-framed second-story windows that turn the corner into the side of the further recessed corner tower. The generally flat north elevation is clad in smooth limestone. The Woodward storefront turns the corner for one bay. Two small windows are located in the tower wall above the storefront. A row of wood windows begins at the west edge of the first bay at the second floor. It continues across the north elevation to near the west end of the elevation. The west end of the elevation has two storefronts at the first floor, each with a recessed side entrance. A large window opening with fixed windows is located at the second floor above the west end storefront. The rear and south elevations are of painted concrete block with two doors in the south elevation. This building occupies the site of a previous Woolworth's store that was the location of the 1937 Woolworth's sit-down strike. It began in the downtown store and moved to this site on March 1 as part of the union's threat to strike all forty Detroit stores.

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒

A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐☒

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- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce

Architecture

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Period of Significance**

c. 1886 - 1966

**Significant Dates**

1936, 1941

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Kahn, Albert

Varney & Winter

O'Dell & Diehl

Hyde & Williams

Barton-Malow Co.

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The New Center Commercial Historic District is significant as a second commercial center outside of downtown Detroit that began in the mid-1880s as development moved northward from downtown after the construction of the nearby railroad and streetcar lines and opening of Grand Boulevard. The district reinforced its importance in the late 1920s through the 1960s when General Motors and the Fisher Brothers intentionally promoted the area as a second center of commerce in response to the congestion in downtown Detroit. It is significant at the local level under criteria A for its role in the commercial development of Detroit between c. 1886 and 1965; and under criteria C as the district contains examples of neighborhood commercial architecture by several notable Detroit architects including Albert Kahn, Varney and Winter and O'Dell and Diehl in the Commercial, Neo-Classical, Art Deco and Moderne styles. Buildings in the district show the range of commercial buildings constructed and altered during that time period.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The beginning of the New Center Commercial Historic District is tied to the development of Woodward Avenue, Milwaukee Junction and Grand Boulevard. At least portions of Woodward Avenue likely predate the European settlement of Detroit in 1701 as a Native American trail used to travel northward from the river. The street was named by Augustus B. Woodward, the first chief justice appointed for the newly created Michigan Territory in 1805. Judge Woodward was a native of New York, graduated from Columbia College and knew Major L'Enfant, creator of the master plan for Washington D.C. With Detroit almost completely destroyed by fire in June 1805, Judge Woodward was enabled to create a new master plan for the town, which Congress authorized in its 1805-06 session (Ferry, p.14). By 1820 the six miles of Woodward from Grand Circus Park north to Six Mile Road had been improved, more than half that distance with corduroy road, "formed of very large logs laid closely together, across the road, on which are piled small timber brush, clay and sand, making a dry, and at the same time a durable highway," according to a report in the Nov. 10, 1820, *Detroit Gazette* (as quoted in Palmer, p. 287). After state legislation authorized private companies to operate toll roads in 1848, the road was rebuilt as a plank road, with tollgates, all the way to Pontiac. In 1909 Woodward Avenue between 6 and 7 Mile Roads was paved in concrete, the first concrete paved highway in the nation (Gavrilovich, p. 237). By 1916 all twenty-seven miles of Woodward Avenue were paved in concrete. Although Judge Woodward's original plan called for the street to be 150 feet wide it was built much narrower and could not handle the increased population and automobile traffic in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In 1924 the Woodward Avenue Improvement Association was formed with a committee devoted to the widening of Woodward. In 1925 a plan to widen the street to 120 feet between building lines was approved by a city-wide vote. However, the actual widening was not undertaken until 1935 due to delays by the Detroit

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Common Council and court actions. The final section to be widened was the two blocks between Baltimore and Grand Boulevard, which was completed in 1936.

The construction of railroad lines connecting Detroit with other cities beginning in the 1850s facilitated the city's growth northward from the river. Prior to that time development was oriented to the easiest and fastest mode of transportation, the Detroit River. Jefferson Avenue was the principal retail street because of its proximity to the river and because it connected the earliest settlements established by the French in the 1700s. The new railroad lines were constructed north of the river through what was then primarily agricultural land. To the southeast of the New Center Commercial District the intersection of three major railroad lines called the Milwaukee Junction was fully in place by 1872. This important railroad junction is where the Detroit & Milwaukee Railroad crossed the Grand Trunk Railway and the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad. All three of these lines reached from Detroit to points in northern and western Michigan. The Detroit & Milwaukee ran northwest from the Detroit waterfront via Pontiac to Grand Haven. The original Detroit-Pontiac line was completed in 1843 and extended to the Grand Haven area by 1858. The Detroit & Toledo Railroad, completed in 1856, ran southwest from the junction east of Woodward to Toledo. It was soon acquired by the Michigan Southern/ later Lake Shore & Michigan Southern (LS&MS) and formed a branch of their Cleveland-Chicago main line through Toledo. The Grand Trunk's Detroit-Port Huron railroad line, initially the Chicago, Detroit & Canada Grand Trunk Junction Railroad, was completed in 1859. Trains of a fourth line, the Detroit & Bay City, built from Detroit as far as Saginaw by 1873 and ultimately to the Straits of Mackinac, also ran through the junction. In 1881 this line was leased by the Michigan Central (Belden; Dunbar, 92, 96-97, 144-45; Farmer, 892, 895). Because of the close proximity of railroad lines serving these myriad destinations, by the 1880s numerous manufacturing facilities had located along the railroad lines in the Milwaukee Junction area. These firms included the American Radiator Corporation, the Acme White Lead and Color Works, the Russell Wheel and Foundry Company, the Peninsular Car Company and the Murphy Chair Company (Robinson, p. 8:6-7).

Two of the railroad lines, the Grand Trunk and the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, crossed Woodward Avenue one block south of the district. By 1884 a LS&MS passenger depot was located at the southwest intersection of the railroad and Woodward Avenue, one block south of the New Center Commercial district.

The Detroit City Railway's Woodward Avenue horsecar line's first section went into operation in 1863 and the line was extended northward to just south of the Milwaukee Junction railroad crossing by 1879. In 1886 the Highland Park Railway, an electric trolley line, went into operation, running up Woodward from just north of the crossing for another five miles. It had a car shop and barn on the west side of Woodward just north of the railroad tracks. The Detroit Citizens Street Railway, successor to Detroit City Railway, electrified the line in 1892 and in 1893 connected it with the Highland Park line, forming a continuous trolley line from downtown Detroit to Highland Park (Farmer, 931-32; Schramm and Henning, 27, 29, 38-39; 71).

The development of manufacturing and multiple transportation options in this part of the city spurred residential growth in the surrounding area. The three subdivisions along the east and

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west sides of Woodward north of the railroad tracks that include the lands within the district were platted beginning in 1878, the first being the Patrick McGinnis Subdivision at the southeast corner of the district. It included the land along Woodward's east side from the railroad right-of-way two blocks north to include the south side of Milwaukee (originally named McCune; Baltimore was named McGinnis) and eastward for several blocks beyond the east edge of the nominated district. The plat included six 200-foot deep lots facing Woodward between today's Baltimore and Milwaukee streets with a north-south alley running behind (there were three more lots fronting on Woodward between Baltimore and the railroad right-of-way), with the lots to the east facing the east-west running streets with alleys in the center of the block.

The next area platted in the nominated district was Frisbie and Foxen's Subdivision, laid out in 1882. This subdivision includes the frontage on Woodward's east side from Milwaukee Avenue (so named in that plat) north to Grand Boulevard (called "Boulevard" in the plat) and extends east between those two streets well beyond the district's east edge to Russell Street. As in the Patrick McGinnis Subdivision there are 200-foot deep lots facing Woodward – eight in this block – with a north-south alley behind. To the alley's east, in the first two blocks, the lots face the east-west running streets and have an east-west running public alley down the center of the blocks.

The Moran and Moross Subdivision on the west side of Woodward was platted in 1884. It included the land on Woodward's west side between Milwaukee and Grand Boulevard and extended several blocks west between the two streets. The easternmost block bounded by Grand Boulevard, Woodward, Milwaukee and Cass was divided into eight deep lots, four facing Woodward and four Cass, without an alley. This same block was replatted in 1892 as the Moross Estate Subdivision. The replatting provided for more intensive development, with sixteen rather than four lots along Woodward, mostly twenty feet wide except the north one at the Grand Boulevard corner that already contained a church building. The lots fronting on Cass were mostly thirty feet wide. The new plat provided a U-shaped mid-block alley off Milwaukee to access the backs of these lots and to wrap around an existing house.

The state legislature had authorized creation of Grand Boulevard in 1879 at the instigation of Greenfield Township residents, Edward Chope and James Manfield, along with Springwells Township resident Bela Hubbard. They envisioned a landscaped boulevard extending from the east riverfront around the developed parts of the city to the west riverfront, thereby connecting all of the surrounding townships with Woodward Avenue in Detroit. The exact route was not specified in the legislation but a commission was created with appointments from Detroit and the surrounding townships. Initial municipal funding was low and there was disagreement as to whether the route should run inside or outside of the various railroad lines surrounding the city. The final 11.29-mile route was established in 1883 and James Frisbie was the first to donate land he had set aside in the north edge of his Frisbie and Foxen's Subdivision between Woodward and Russell Street to the east for the Boulevard, thus forming the district's north edge east of Woodward. Colonel John Atkinson owned the corresponding land to the north and made an equal donation resulting in a 150-foot wide roadway. A ceremony to turn the first sod for the project was held in 1883. A lack of municipal support prompted private donations of land and improvements along the route. Nine-tenths of the land for the roadway was donated by the

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landowners and the most elaborate landscaping was completed by Bela Hubbard in 1889. The entire route came within the city's boundaries as a result of the 1885 annexation by the city of large areas of lands from the surrounding townships. In 1889 state legislator James A. Randall obtained passage of a bill to bring Grand Boulevard and all of the city parks under one city Parks and Boulevards Commission as well as authorizing the city to borrow a half-million dollars to pave Grand Boulevard. It appears that the paving and road improvements were completed about 1898, with an extension of the south leg after 1901 (Stocking, p.8).

The intersection of Woodward Avenue, the railroad lines, and the developing Grand Boulevard created a logical location for the development of a new commercial area. In 1884, the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* cover just the southeast corner of the district. A single one-story and two, two-story commercial buildings are located at the northeast corner of Woodward and Baltimore (then named McGinnis). The first city directory with a street address listing is in 1888 and shows that the east and west sides of Woodward between Milwaukee and Baltimore were already fully built up. This is further evidenced in the 1889 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*. The Sanborns indicate that south of Milwaukee both sides of Woodward are built up with two-story commercial buildings. Some of the businesses listed include a bakery, hardware, wallpaper and paints store, lumber yard, and plumbing and horse-shoeing shops. The second floors contained a hall in one case and presumably housing in the buildings on the west side of Woodward as there appears to be a row of one-story connected carriage houses in the alley behind the buildings. North of Milwaukee the North Baptist Church was in the process of being built at the southwest corner of Woodward and Grand Boulevard and a large house is shown at the northwest corner of Woodward and Milwaukee. Two one-story commercial buildings are located on the east side of Woodward in the center of the block.

The 1897 Sanborn maps show a more developed commercial area on both sides of Woodward south of Grand Boulevard. The existing c. 1896 three-story building at the southeast corner of Woodward and East Grand Boulevard, 6550-68 Woodward, is shown. The replatted area on the west side of Woodward appears, and the church and house remain at the north and south ends of the block; however, commercial-sized lots line Woodward in front of the house and three-story commercial buildings have been constructed. The two-story Brown Block has been constructed at the southeast corner of Woodward and Milwaukee. Although the second-floor windows and storefronts have been altered, the south half of the building survives as the present-day Detroit Hardware at 6432 Woodward. East and west of the district there are duplexes and single-family houses lining Milwaukee and Baltimore as well as some industrial buildings next to the railroad.

A March 19, 1905, article in the *Detroit News Tribune* and a July 14, 1906, article in the *Detroit Free Press* about the area describe a bustling commercial area. The 1905 article calls the area "North-Woodward-Town" and describes it as "an example of a thoroughly modern, well kept, and complete village within the city...." The area supported its own newspaper, the *Detroit Gazette*, and the commercial establishments included two express companies, a branch bank, decorators, tailors, hardware merchants and druggists. Bars, billiard rooms, bowling alley and dance hall served the recreation needs of the surrounding residents. The 1906 article describes the newly constructed "subway" – the first railroad/street separation in the city, where Woodward Avenue runs through an underpass beneath the railroad tracks. It noted that the area

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also contained two passenger depots, those of the Michigan Central and the Lake Shore, along with a Grand Trunk freight depot. It reported that the residents north of Grand Boulevard did not want the commercial area to expand northward as they felt the three-block area was sufficient to meet their needs and expansion would devalue their properties.

With the city's dramatic growth in the early twentieth century, fueled by the rapid development of the auto industry, this commercial node, located at a now increasingly important intersection and in the burgeoning Milwaukee Junction industrial area, developed rapidly. In October 1914 Detroit architects A. C. Varney and Winter were issued a permit for the two-story commercial building on the northeast corner of Woodward and Baltimore (6400-02 Woodward). The still-standing building had stores facing Woodward and Baltimore and later occupants included a beer garden and rifle range. Bowling alleys were installed on the second floor in 1919.

The importance of the area was reinforced in 1915 when the Detroit City Plan Commission hired Edward H. Bennett of Chicago to prepare a preliminary city plan – the first for Detroit, which was undergoing an unprecedented population explosion. Bennett proposed a grand plaza (never executed) at the intersection of Woodward and Grand Boulevard (Ferry, p. 217). The same year Henry Ford Hospital opened about a half mile west of Woodward and surrounding residential development was well underway.

Two of the existing buildings in the district were constructed during this period. In 1915 the Dime Savings Bank built a branch bank at the northwest corner of Woodward and Milwaukee (6501 Woodward). Although the east façade has been changed, the south elevation facing Milwaukee is still intact. In 1916 the Detroit Savings Bank constructed the Albert Kahn-designed Neo-Classical branch bank located on the northeast corner of Woodward and Milwaukee (6438 Woodward). These buildings were likely the first constructed in the district as branch banks. Branch banking in Detroit grew rapidly between 1905 and 1906 and were first opened in existing buildings of the district. However, by 1910 free-standing buildings constructed specifically as banks, with architecture to reinforce the quality and dependence of the banks were prominent (Mills, p. 8-14). The Neo-Classical bank at Woodward and Milwaukee is an excellent and intact example of this trend.

Banks weren't the only businesses opening branches in the district. In 1919 the Detroit-based Sanders Confectionary opened a branch in the south storefronts of 6550-68 Woodward, the company's first venture outside of downtown. In 1928 a permit was issued to Fred Sanders to construct a new building just to the south for a new store and restaurant at 6532 Woodward. In 1967 the store/restaurant moved across Woodward into the former Norwood Theater at 6531-35 Woodward.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century Detroit's industrial base expanded dramatically with the growth of automobile and other manufacturing. Ford's Highland Park plant was constructed to the north of the area in 1909 and was but the largest of many auto-related plants nearby that included a number of auto-related plants along the Milwaukee Junction railroad lines. An influx of factory workers created a boom that resulted in Detroit's population growing from 285,704 people in 1900 to over one million by 1930.

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In the midst of this growth William Durand chose to build the new headquarters building for the General Motors Corporation on West Grand Boulevard just one block west of Woodward Avenue. By that time downtown Detroit was too densely built up and expensive to meet Durand's need for a large parcel of land. The new headquarters location also had the benefit of being near many of the General Motors factories located in the Milwaukee Junction area. Completion of the Albert Kahn-designed General Motors building in 1922 and construction of GM's huge adjacent Research Laboratory (Argonaut) Building in 1928 (with 1936 addition) brought a large new customer base to this commercial area, which acquired the name "New Center" in the 1920s. Many of the company's suppliers such as advertising agencies also relocated to the area. Another key development for the area was the construction of the Fisher and New Center Buildings. In 1927 the Fisher Brothers, makers of auto bodies ("Body by Fisher"), had Albert Kahn design their new headquarters on West Grand Boulevard two blocks west of Woodward. It was built in 1927-28. The Fisher brothers "envisioned the New Center, a secondary business district that would relieve the congestion of the downtown area and at the same time be more accessible to the suburbs" (Ferry, p. 334). The second part of their proposed multi-building project – the rest went by the wayside with the onset of the Depression) – the ten-story New Center Building on Second Avenue one block off West Grand Boulevard and diagonally across the street from the Fisher Building, was built in 1930-31.

In 1929 the A. M. Campau Realty Company demolished all of the buildings at the northeast corner of Woodward and Milwaukee to construct two one-story commercial buildings. The company was founded by Alex M. Campau, a member of one of the city's early French families that arrived in the eighteenth century, and by the 1920s it was run by his grandson A. Macomb Campau. Construction began on the first building at 6520 Woodward in January 1929. It has a Classical design with its brick front and limestone trim and initially housed a Neisner Brothers department store. Just to the south, at the corner of Milwaukee, construction on the company's colorful Art Deco building at 6500 Woodward began in September 1929. The first tenant of the building was a branch of the L. K. Liggett Company which had moved to this location in 1927. The L. K. Liggett Company was a drug store chain owned by Detroit native Louis K. Liggett (1875-1946). Liggett had a successful venture selling a bottled tonic called Vinol for four years and in 1902 founded the United Drug Company in Boston, a cooperative of pharmacists that purchased drugs directly from the Boston factory and sold them under the Rexall brand. In 1916 the L. K. Liggett Company was founded and opened 152 stores around the country. The Liggett store remained in the location through at least 1940.

The widening of this part of Woodward Avenue in 1936 resulted in all but two of the buildings on the west side of Woodward being demolished. The exception appears to be the former Dime Savings Bank located at 6501 Woodward, where the building scars indicate that rather than being a replacement building for one entirely demolished, only the front section was removed and a new façade installed. The south side facade retains its original decorative details. The Norwood Theater was the second building that appears to have been shortened; a new Moderne façade was installed on the building.

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The F. W. Woolworth building at the southwest corner of Woodward and West Grand Boulevard, 6565 Woodward, was the first new building to be constructed along the west side of this newly widened two-block stretch of Woodward. It was built in 1940. The previous building at the same location was the site of a 1937 sit-down strike that began in the downtown Woolworth's store on February 27. On Monday, March 1, the strike was expanded to the New Center store as a demonstration of the union's threat to shut down all forty Detroit stores (Frank, p. 72). The choice of the New Center store as the second strike location evidences the importance of the area and store at that time.

In 1941 the other one-story commercial buildings on Woodward's west side in that block were constructed. They all have enameled metal panel fronts and one building has a Moderne detail across the top of the wall. The designs of the Woolworth's and other new commercial buildings are very geometric and simple, good typical examples of new commercial buildings being constructed at that time.

Following World War II growth started moving away from the central Detroit corridor. The city's population peaked in 1952 at 1.85 million (Darden, p. 19). The Northland Shopping Center constructed in Southfield in 1951 was just the start of a local trend that meshed with the nationwide trend of large suburban shopping centers and malls replacing traditional downtown commercial centers. The expanding auto industry, aided by federal transportation and housing policies, embraced the massive suburbanization trend (Darden, p. 11). Despite New Center being one of the city's development priorities in the 1950s and 1960s, along with cosmetic attempt to revitalize sections of the city, it could not "counter significantly the ongoing trends of decentralization and disinvestment" (Darden, p. 5, 45).

General Motors remained a major employer in the area and undertook a large rehabilitation of the surrounding residential area in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Their presence, along with the efforts of the New Center Council, a local business organization created in 1967, allowed the New Center commercial area to survive. One long time business, Detroit Hardware, has remained in the same building since 1933. Small local businesses such as restaurants, barbershops, shoe stores and a medical supply store remain in the district. A façade grant program in the early 2000s restored some of the historic features of several buildings. With the increasing success of downtown and the cultural center areas the New Center commercial area is in a good location for future investment and rehabilitation.

## **Architecture**

Although a few of the extant buildings in the district were constructed as early as the mid-1880s, the architecture that is predominant in the district is from the neighborhood's strongest period of development, the 1910s through about 1940. The district's building stock is representative of the architecture of Detroit's neighborhood commercial areas from the 1890s through 1965. The city contains numerous commercial districts that developed around the intersections of major streets during the city's boom period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The large-scale decline in the city's population and economy in the decades from the 1960s to the present has resulted in massive spot demolitions and very widespread inappropriate storefront

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modernizations. The New Center commercial area has retained a much greater vitality than most of these neighborhood commercial areas and retains more of its older buildings, and with historical integrity above many of these areas. The most notable buildings in the district include the following:

- The broad-fronted three-story c. 1896 Late Victorian block at 6550-68 Woodward. Despite the loss of low square-plan “tower” features at the front corners and a central pedimented gable (a c. 1950 photo shows these features already gone), the building retains its basic form with paneled frieze and five two-story bay windows across the front. The survival of a building of this age and size, with its level of integrity, this far northward on Woodward is very unusual.
- Commercial style building at 6400-02 Woodward, designed in 1914 by Varney and Winter. This building with its white brick face, large square-plan windows separated by thin brick piers, and, especially, the surviving well proportioned cornice with its paired and single brackets is a fine representative example of early twentieth-century Commercial style buildings despite the usual inappropriate ground-floor storefront treatments.
- The 1916 Neo-Classical former branch bank building at 6438 Woodward, designed by Albert Kahn. With its limestone-clad front and long side street side and its massive Doric portico *in antis* outlined by an assertive Greek fretwork band, the building is one of the outstanding examples of Neo-classical branch bank buildings among the many throughout the city first identified in a city-wide reconnaissance-level survey and now being studied in greater detail for a National Register multiple-property nomination project.
- The colorful Art Deco building at 6500 Woodward was designed by O’Dell and Diehl in 1929. Detroit’s smaller-scale terra cotta-clad buildings of the 1920s should be more widely recognized as important architectural features of the city. Rebecca Binno Savage and Greg Kowalski’s *Art Deco in Detroit* (2004) has been the pioneer – and so far the only – book to show off the city’s rich heritage of buildings large and small from the 1920s and 30s, but only in black and white (this building illustrated in page 86). This building is one of the outstanding examples, despite its relatively small size, using multi-colored tiles in triangle or zigzag shapes across the upper façade – *Art Deco in Detroit* calls it a “stunning French Art Deco patterned detail” – along with the bright red tiled pent roof to create a bright splash of color and form. Its storefronts facing the two streets could relatively easily be sensitively rehabilitated.
- The Hyde and Williams-designed Moderne style Woolworth’s store on the southwest corner of Woodward and West Grand Boulevard from 1940. This limestone-clad building would have stood out when built for its artfully simplified Moderne/International style finish. It was clearly designed for its highly prominent corner location, with the square-plan tower with its slight setback from the Woodward side and its bands of low second-story windows beneath broad limestone upper façade bands.

### **Architects**

These buildings are associated with a number of well known Detroit-based architects along with others whose work is not as well known in the city as yet.

### Varney and Winter

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The two-story commercial building at Woodward and Baltimore was designed by the firm of Varney and Winter in 1914. The firm is best known for its design of residences, apartment buildings and factories. This is one of few examples of a neighborhood commercial building by them so far identified in Detroit. Almon C. Varney was born in New York in 1849 and studied architecture under Darius Norcross in Glens Falls, New York, before coming to Detroit in 1879. Varney opened his own firm and designed and constructed one of early apartment buildings in Detroit in 1892. Varney had a long career and designed factories and at least one residence for the Boydell Brothers. He also designed some of the early buildings at the former Parke-Davis and Company complex on the Detroit River. His brother Freeman N. Varney was a member of the firm, and later his son Freeman Orla Varney associated with the practice.

Frederick J. Winter Jr. was born in Detroit in 1877 and began working in an architect's office in 1892. He joined A. C. Varney and Company in 1899 and became a named partner in the firm in 1906. In 1910 the firm name became A. C. Varney & F. J. Winter. The firm designed factories for Briggs Manufacturing and Metzger Motors and continued until Varney's retirement. He passed away in 1930 in Florida. Winter died in 1956.

### Albert Kahn

Albert Kahn designed the Neo-Classical style Detroit Savings Bank at Woodward and Milwaukee built in 1916. The building was one of a number of Detroit neighborhood branch bank buildings designed by Kahn, whose clients included the Bank of Detroit and Central Savings Bank as well as the Detroit Savings Bank, and its distinctive façade design is duplicated in several other Detroit Savings' branch buildings around the city. Detroit's best known architect – with an international reputation – and perhaps the city's most prolific architect as well, Albert Kahn (1869-1942) was born in Germany and moved with his family to Detroit in 1880. In 1885 to augment the family income, he took a job as an office boy for George D. Mason, where he then became a draftsman. In 1891 he won an *American Architect* scholarship to study abroad for one year. After his return to Detroit he continued with Mason and Rice and worked on the Livingstone House (1893; demolished) and offices for the Hiram Walker & Sons distillery in Windsor, Ontario (1894). In 1896 Kahn formed his own firm in partnership with two other colleagues, George G. Nettleton and Alexander B. Trowbridge. For a year the three practiced under the name Nettleton, Kahn and Trowbridge until Trowbridge took the position of dean at the then Cornell College of Architecture. The firm then became Nettleton and Kahn until Nettleton died in 1900. In 1900 George Mason worked with Kahn and they designed the Palms Apartment Building in 1901. The partnership was short-lived and ended in 1902.

Kahn's Detroit practice flourished and in 1903 Albert's brother, Julius, joined the firm as the chief engineer. The pair built the Engineering Building at the University of Michigan using concrete construction and the experience led Julius to design a new system of concrete reinforcement. Julius then turned to manufacturing this new system and became president of the Trussed Concrete Steel Company in Youngstown, Ohio.

Albert Kahn is most known for his innovative design work in industrial buildings. His first large scale project was a new plant for the Packard Motor Car Company in 1903. Although the first nine buildings were of mill construction that was typical at the time, in 1905 Kahn used his

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brother's system of reinforced concrete beginning in building number 10. This new system eliminated fire hazards and gave more clear space between columns. In 1907 Kahn utilized this new system in both the Grabowsky Power Wagon Company and the Chalmers Motor Car Company plants. Shortly thereafter Henry Ford hired Kahn to design his new Highland Park automobile plant. This plant was the first to use industrial steel sash in combination with the concrete frame (Ferry, *The Legacy of Albert Kahn*, 12).

But Kahn and his firm were well known for far more than their industrial work. This included, as a sampling, Detroit office buildings such as the Grinnell Brothers Building (1908), Palmer Office and Store Building (1910), and the General Motors, Fisher and New Center buildings in the New Center area; the National Theater (1910); and many automobile dealership/garage buildings in Detroit and across the nation. Among the many types of buildings the firm designed, it made a specialty of bank buildings. A 1929 Albert Kahn, Inc., monograph, *Architectural Treatment of Bank Buildings*, illustrated selected examples of their vast array of bank work in Detroit and elsewhere. The firm's projects list includes nine Detroit Savings Bank buildings designed between 1904 and 1923. Three of the bank's branch buildings, including the Woodward Avenue one, have identical fronts (*Architectural Treatment* shows one of the other examples) and there may have been others, now demolished. The body of Detroit's branch banks are currently being studied as part of a project carried out for the State Historic Preservation Office in concert with Detroit's Historic Designation Advisory Board, but it is clear that this building is notable among the city's Neo-Classical branch bank buildings for its architectural character and relative degree of intact-ness among such buildings in the city.

### O'Dell and Diehl

O'Dell and Diehl designed the Liggett Drug Store at 6500 Woodward in 1929. The building was designed early in the firm's brief four-year existence. While not a large building among the commercial buildings of its time in Detroit, it stands out very strongly along the Woodward streetscape for its Art Deco terra cotta work and its red tile roof – a highly textural and particularly colorful example of the 1920s terra cotta commercial architecture that dots Detroit's main streets and should be more widely recognized as an important aspect of the city's architectural heritage. Diehl became best known for the large number of Catholic churches he designed throughout the region. The firm of O'Dell & Diehl was a partnership between Augustus H. ("Gus") O'Dell (1875-1965) and George F. Diehl (1892-1977) from 1928 to 1932. Gus O'Dell was born in Port Huron and came to Detroit in 1895. He studied under Emil Lorch at the Detroit Institute of Arts and worked as a draftsman for Malcomson & Higginbotham and Rogers and MacFarlane until 1902 when he entered into the partnership of Baxter & O'Dell. The firm lasted until 1923. After his partnership with Diehl ended in 1932 he formed a firm with Wirt Rowland that lasted for six years before O'Dell entered into practice on his own. His Detroit designs included Forest Apartments (1908), Phillips Manor (1912), Webster Hall (1916; demolished), and Detroit Stock Exchange (1928; demolished). Some of his later notable works listed in his 1957 nomination to the Fellowship in the American Institute of Architects include the Northville State Hospital, the Henry and Edsel Ford Auditorium, and the Oakland County Courthouse. He was president of the Michigan Society of Architects from 1931 to 1933. In addition to his professional work he served in World War I, assisted in establishing a zoning

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ordinance in Bloomfield Hills and sat as a municipal judge in that same city, and served on the Michigan Architectural Registration Board.

George F. Diehl was born in Detroit, educated at the University of Michigan, and worked as a draftsman from 1908 to 1925 with a variety of Detroit firms including Donaldson & Meier, Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, Albert Kahn and Baxter & O'Dell. After the partnership with O'Dell he practiced on his own and his son Gerald joined the firm in 1946, creating the firm Diehl & Diehl in 1947. Diehl designed many churches and buildings for the Catholic church including St. John's Seminary in Plymouth, Blessed Sacrament Cathedral towers, St. Scholastica High School and Gesu St. Brigid.

### Hyde and Williams

The Detroit firm of Hyde and Williams designed the Woolworth's building at the southwest corner of Woodward and West Grand Boulevard in 1940. It was constructed by Detroit contractor the Barton-Malow Company. The firm's most notable known work is a remodeling and addition to the downtown Detroit Woolworths in 1940. It is not known whether the firm was engaged by Woolworth's for the design of the New Center store or whether the owners of the land, the Henry family, hired the firm. Arthur K. Hyde (1895-1970) was born in Detroit and attended the University of Michigan. His partnership with Albert E. Williams existed from 1936 to 1941. He worked at Giffels and Vallet from 1940 to 1957 and in 1962 worked for Harley, Ellington, Cowin & Stirton. Other of his works include the Tower Theater (1935; demolished) in northwest Detroit and the Wyandotte Theater. Albert Williams was born in England in 1877 and by 1897 was a draftsman with Spier & Rohns. His early designs include the Church of Immaculate Conception (1904) in Windsor, Ontario, Church of Our Lady of the Lake (1907) in Walkerville, Ontario, and also a creamery on the east side of Detroit (1912).

### **Contractors**

The district's buildings also include two built by a historically important building firm, the H. G. Christman-Burke Company.

### H.G. Christman-Burke Company

Both the Neisner Brothers Store and the Liggett Drug Store were constructed by the H. G. Christman-Burke Company in 1929 for the A. M. Campau Realty Company. Heinrich G. Christman founded Christman in South Bend, Indiana, in 1863, and the four Christman sons led by Henry continued the firm after the father's 1886 death as Christman Brothers. By the early twentieth century the firm, reorganized in 1907 as the Henry G. or H. G. Christman Co., was specializing in large-scale reinforced concrete projects. Christman opened a Detroit branch in 1911 and, following work for Oldsmobile in 1915 that led to other industrial work in Lansing, established in 1919 a Lansing branch. In 1927 the company separated into three separate entities based in South Bend, Detroit, and Lansing – the Detroit firm labeled the H. G. Christman-Burke Co. – all under the majority ownership of H. G. Christman. H. G. Christman-Burke's large projects in the late 1920s included construction of the Fisher Building and the Detroit Masonic Temple, in which the Lansing firm, H. G. Christman-Lansing, also played an important role. The Detroit-based Christman firm, along with the South Bend one, were victims of the Depression in 1932-33. The Lansing firm, H.G. Christman-Lansing, was renamed The Christman Company

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Inc. in 1933 and, reorganized again as the Christman Company in 1940, remains a large and important building firm today. Among early projects under the 1940 name was the Sojourner Truth Homes housing project in Detroit (Summarized from Frazier).

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
☐ previously listed in the National Register

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☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register  
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark  
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

☒ State Historic Preservation Office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency  
☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** N/A

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 4.129

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

|                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 42.221145 | Longitude: -83.042639  |
| 2. Latitude: 42.221310 | Longitude: -83.042180  |
| 3. Latitude: 42.220717 | Longitude: - 83.041734 |
| 4. Latitude: 42.220824 | Longitude: -83.042309  |

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

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- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Beginning at the northwest corner of Lot 4, Block 1 of the Moran Moross Subdivision and continuing eastward along the centerline of Grand Boulevard to the northeast corner of Lot 1 of the Frisbie and Foxen's Subdivision. Then continuing southward along the east lot lines of Lots 1 through 8 of the Frisbie and Foxen's Subdivision and across Milwaukee Avenue to the northeast corner of Lot 9 of the Patrick McGinnis Subdivision. Then continuing southward along the east lot lines of Lots 9 through 1 of the Patrick McGinnis Subdivision to Baltimore Street. Thence westward along the centerline of Baltimore Street to its intersection with the centerline of Woodward Avenue. Thence northward along the centerline of Woodward Avenue to its intersection with the centerline of Milwaukee Avenue. Thence westward along the centerline of Milwaukee Avenue to the southwest corner of Lot 15 of the Moross Estate Subdivision. Thence north and westward along the west lot lines of Lots 15 through 2 of the Moross Estate Subdivision, thence westward along the south lot line of Lot 1 of the Moross Estate Subdivision, thence northward along the west lot line of Lot 1 of the Moross Estate Subdivision and thence westward along the south lot line of Lot 4 of the Moran Moross Subdivision. Thence northward along the west lot line of Lot 4 of the Moran Moross Subdivision to the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass all of the commercial buildings in the area that remain from the district's development between c. 1880 and 1965. The land surrounding the district is either vacant or contains newer, unrelated properties.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kristine M. Kidorf  
organization: Kidorf Preservation Consulting  
street & number: 451 E. Ferry Street  
city or town: Detroit state: MI zip code: 48202  
e-mail kristine@kidorfpreservationconsulting.com  
telephone: 313-300-9376  
date: October 2015

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: New Center Commercial Historic District

City or Vicinity: Detroit

County: Wayne

State: MI

Photographer: Kristine M. Kidorf

Date Photographed: September 13, 2015

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 12 – Looking southeast from Woodward and Milwaukee at east side of Woodward, 6438 Woodward in foreground.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0001

2 of 12 – Looking northwest from Woodward and Milwaukee at west side of Woodward, 6501 Woodward in foreground.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0002

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3 of 12 – Looking northeast from Woodward and Milwaukee at east side of Woodward, 6500 Woodward in foreground.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0003

4 of 12 – Looking southeast from Woodward and West Grand Boulevard at east side of Woodward, 6550 Woodward in foreground.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0004

5 of 12 – Looking southwest from Woodward and East Grand Boulevard at west side of Woodward, 6565 Woodward in foreground.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0005

6 of 12 – Looking north on Woodward south of Milwaukee.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0006

7 of 12 – Looking northeast from Woodward and Baltimore at 6400 Woodward.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0007

8 of 12 – Looking east at Detroit Savings Bank, 6438 Woodward at Milwaukee.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0008

9 of 12 – Looking northeast at Liggett Drug, 6500 Woodward at Milwaukee.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0009

10 of 12 – Looking southeast at 6550 Woodward.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0010

11 of 12 – Looking west at Woolworths, 6565 Woodward.

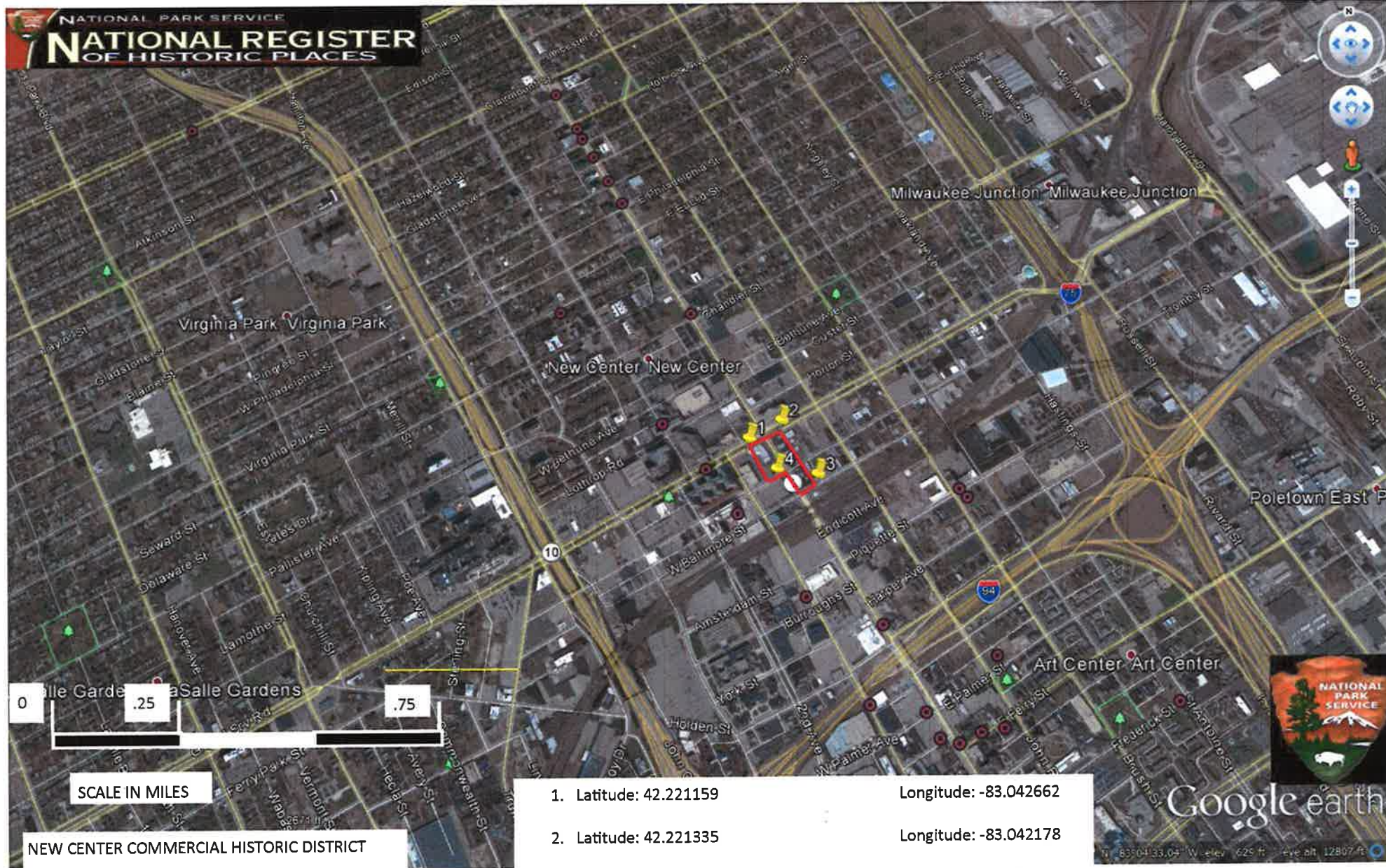
MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0011

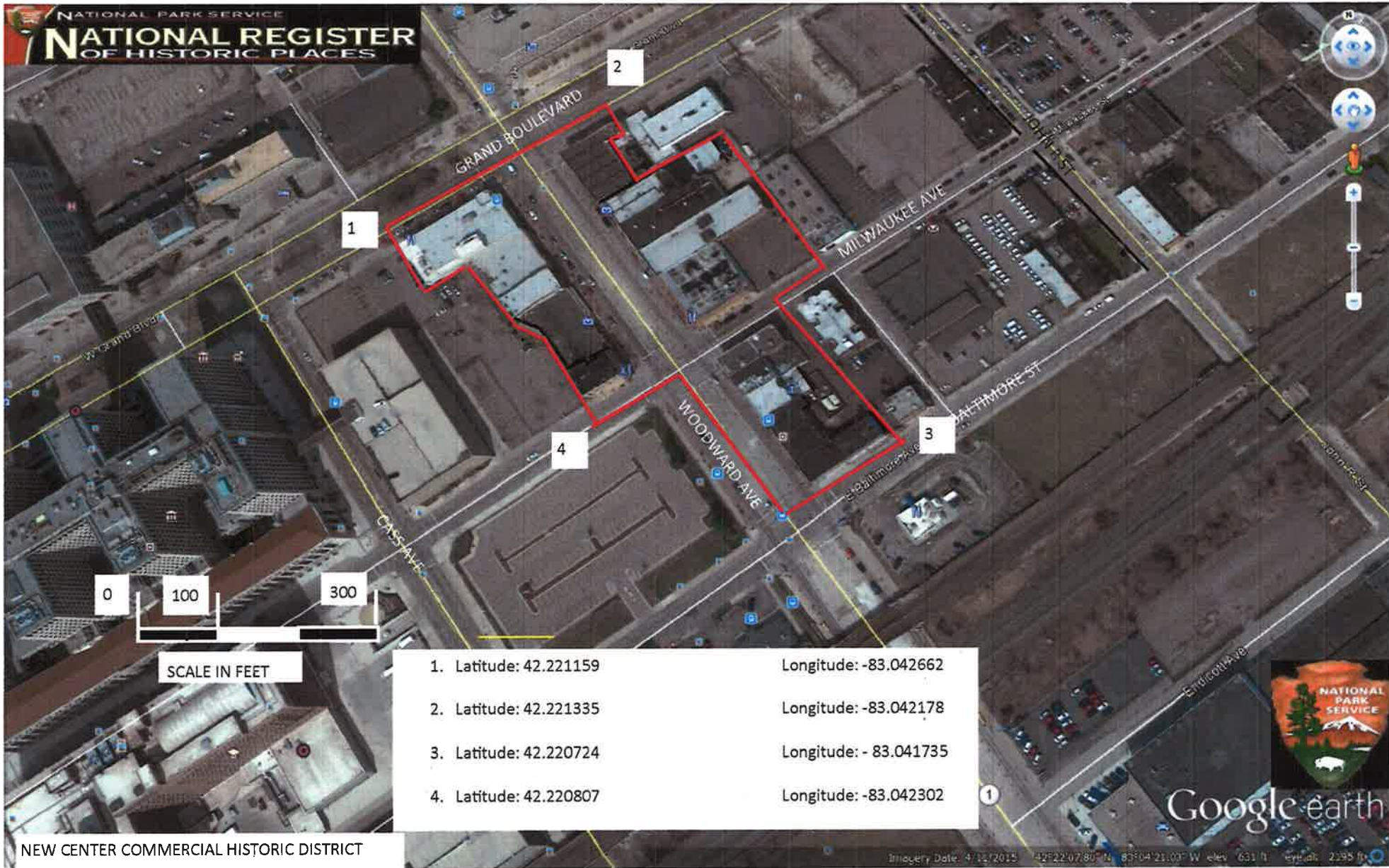
12 of 12 – Looking north at Milwaukee elevation of Dime Savings Bank, 6501 Woodward.

MI\_Wayne County\_New Center Commercial HD\_0012

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.





NEW CENTER COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

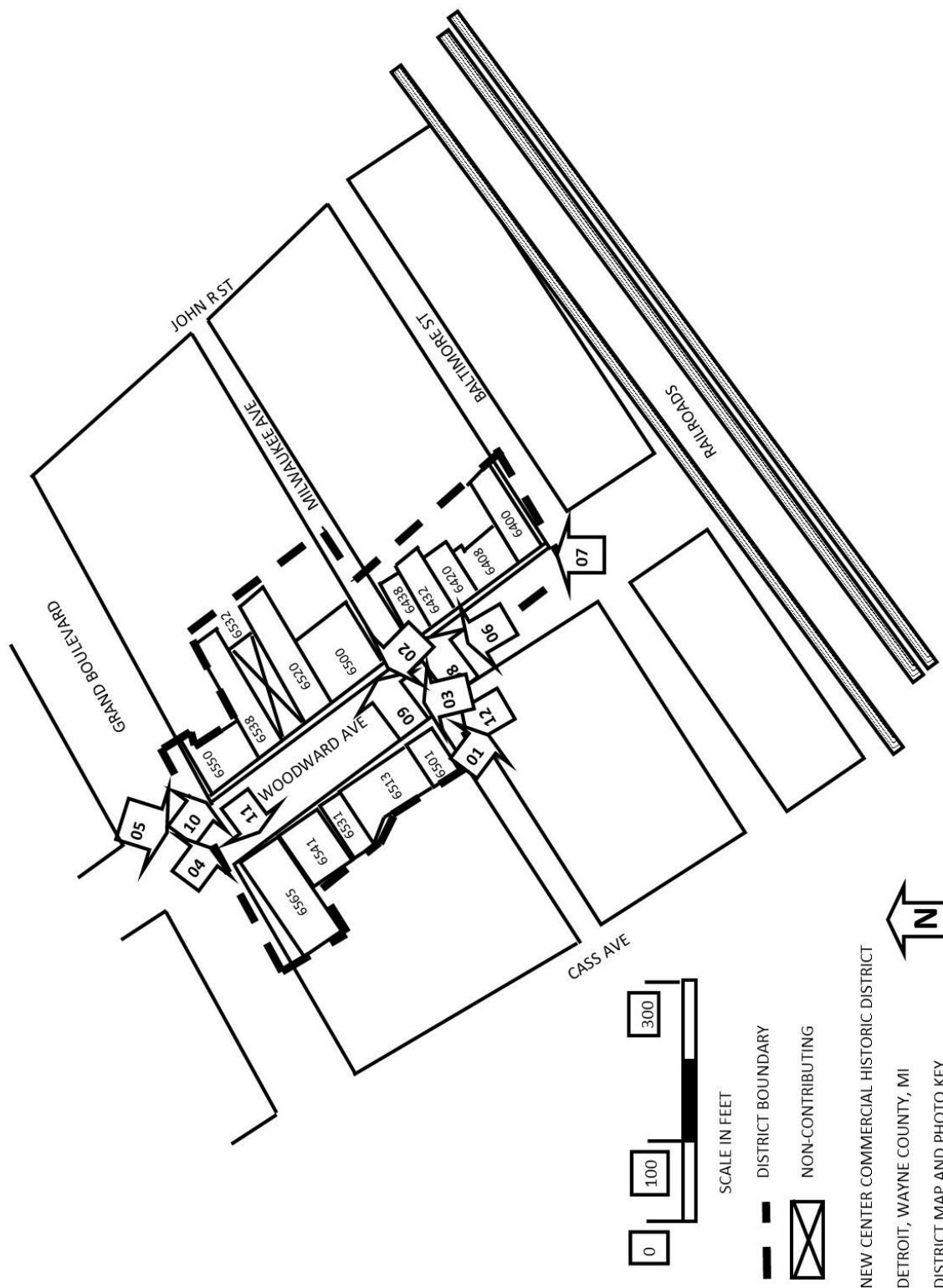
DETROIT, WAYNE COUNTY, MI

LARGE SCALE MAP



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DETROIT SAVINGS BANK

DETROIT HA

ANew Life  
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Orthotics

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HARDWARE  
REPAIRS  
& PARKING

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