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March 23, 2023

HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

RE: Request of Mariners' Church of Detroit for PC (Public Center) Special District Review of proposed exterior alterations to 170 East Jefferson Avenue – Mariners' Church of Detroit
(RECOMMEND APPROVAL WITH CONDITIONS)

REQUEST

The City Planning Commission (CPC) has received a request from Thomas Roberts Architect on behalf of Mariners' Church for PC (Public Center) Special District Review of proposed exterior alterations to 170 East Jefferson Avenue – Mariners' Church of Detroit. This request is being made consistent with the provisions of Section 50-3-225 of the Zoning Ordinance. Section 50-3-225 states that whether or not site plan review is required for a project in the PC District, the exterior design, appearance, and location of exterior alterations shall be reviewed by the CPC and the Planning and Development Department (PDD) and require the authorization of Your Honorable Body.

Site Plan Review

In accordance with the provisions of Section 50-3-113, CPC staff finds that site plan review is not required based on the extent of proposed exterior modifications. Specifically, 50-3-113(5) does not apply as the Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA) is not "the body of first jurisdiction" for the PC District based on Section 50-3-225. Therefore, the CPC and the PDD shall review this request in accordance with Section 50-11-67 PC District review criteria.

BACKGROUND & PROPOSAL

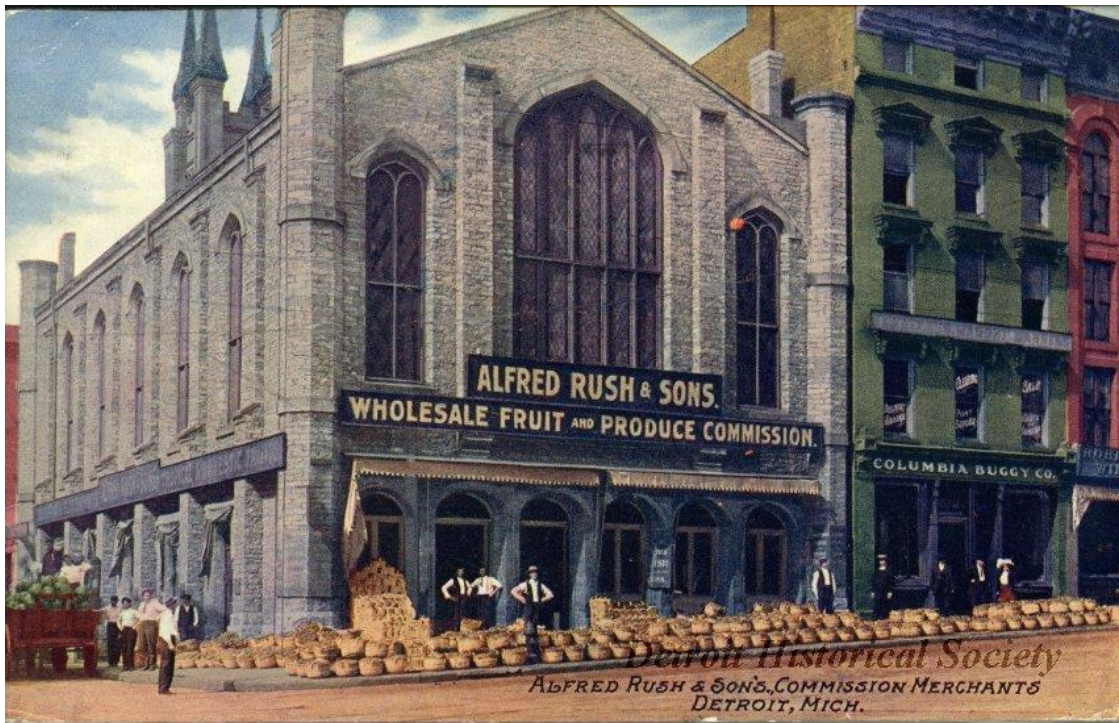
From the Detroit Historical Society's Encyclopedia of Detroit:

Mariners' Church was established in 1842 with money willed by Julia Ann Anderson, the widow of Fort Detroit commander Colonel John Anderson. She specified that her lot on the corner of Woodward Avenue and Woodbridge Street in Detroit become "a site for a Mariners' Church..." specifically to watch over the spiritual well-being of sailors and the greater community. These sailors were often marginalized and treated as outsiders, so she also specified that it be a stone church, with "forever free" pews. Since sailors often could not afford pew rentals or give sufficient tithes to maintain the parish, the will stipulated that stores be designated for the ground floor to provide rental revenue. The plans and drawings of the "Perpendicular Gothic" building were made by C.N. Otis, a Buffalo, New York architect, and in 1849 the Gothic Revival stone structure was constructed on the site of Anderson's mansion. Scattered throughout the church are paintings, photographs and ship models that symbolize its maritime history. The various stained glass windows, by the J & R Lamb Studios, depict mariners and symbols of the Great Lakes. In 1955, Detroit's plans for a new civic center called for the demolition of the church. Instead, the 3000-ton building was moved 880 feet east to its current location. During the move, workers discovered a tunnel under the building from its days as a stop on the Underground Railroad. The Episcopal Church sought to

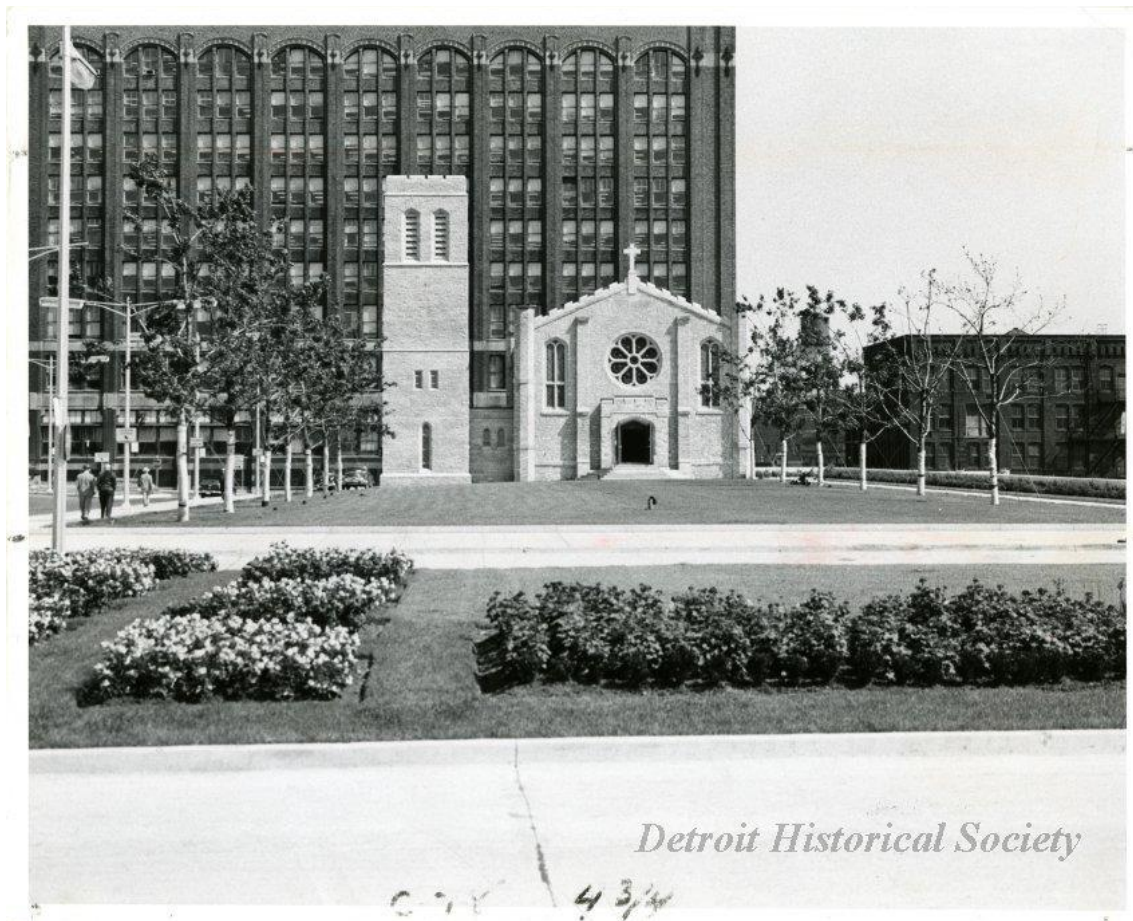
overturn Mariners' continuous legal independence free of denominational ties in the 1980s but was defeated twice. Mariners' has continuously served the community as a church in the Anglican tradition, governed independently.



1890's Image of Previous Location and Pinnacles – Twitter: @detroitstreetvu



1910 Postcard Image of Previous Location – Detroit Historical Society

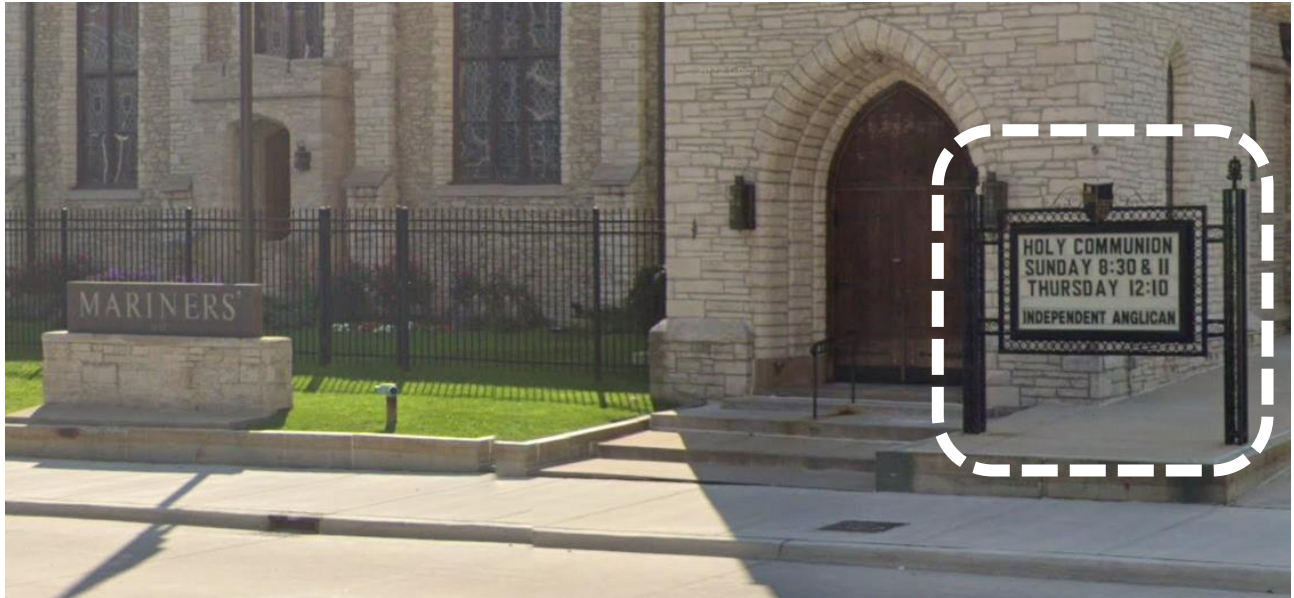


1960 Image of Current Location Looking East from Hart Plaza – Detroit Historical Society

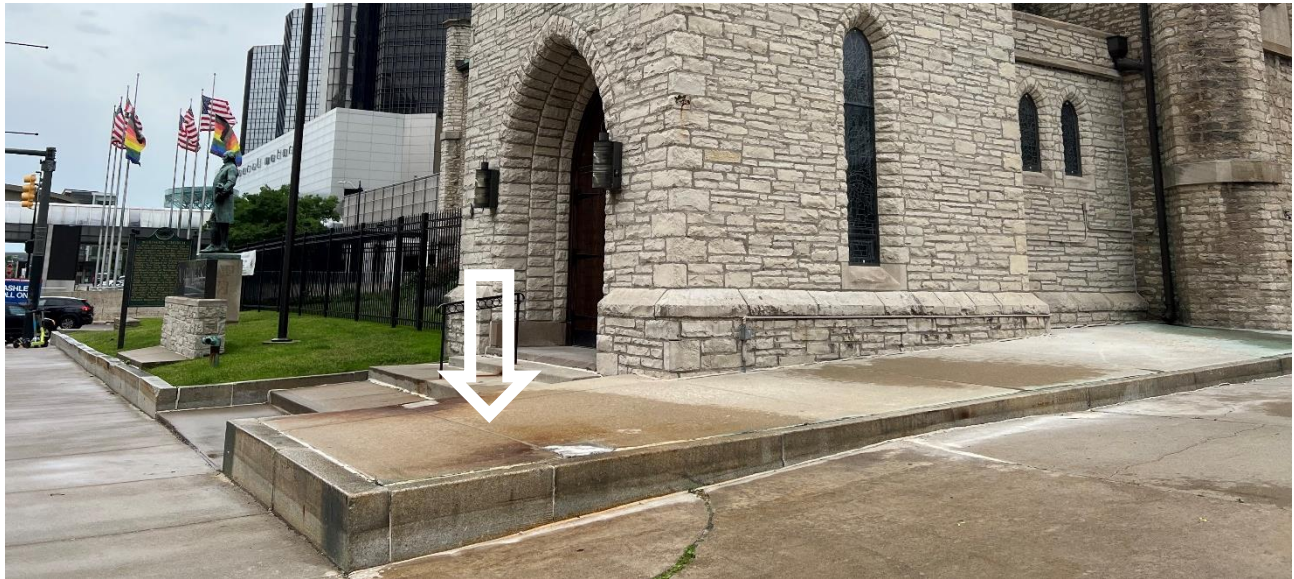
Proposed Exterior Alterations:

1. Pinnacles. Reconstructing new pinnacles at the top of existing turrets located at each of the four corners of the building. Each of the four pinnacles would be approximately 18 feet tall and designed to mimic pinnacles that were previously present on the building as shown in a historic image provided on sheet A7 of the church’s Master Plan. Page notes indicate that the color and finish of the pinnacles would be to match existing stone coping, and dimensions and profiles would be to match historic drawings and photographs as best as possible.
2. Up-lighting. Focused up-lighting is proposed to highlight building architecture of all four facades, the tower, and the four reconstructed pinnacles. No lighting is proposed on the south façade wall facing the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. Up-lighting is also proposed for the existing statue and flag located along East Jefferson Avenue that are separate from the building.
 - a. Section 50-14-418 states that all reasonable measures shall be taken to ensure that off-site spillover of light and nightglow are minimized to the greatest extent possible.
 - b. CPC staff finds that the revised Site Lighting plan dated July 28, 2022, would take reasonable measures to limit light spillover and nightglow as illuminance levels depicted on sheets A106, A108, and A110 indicate that the highest levels of illuminance would be focused on building facades, the tower, and pinnacles, and would not be focused off-site or directly into the sky. Additionally, there are numerous examples of buildings, especially churches, located within the Central Business District that have similar focused up-lighting provided.
3. Signage. Sometime during early-to-mid 2022, the existing readerboard type pole sign facing East Jefferson Avenue was removed from the site, see the below images for verification. It is our understanding that the church plans to replace this sign in the near future, potentially with

an upgraded digital sign similar to the removed sign. At this time, the applicant is not seeking approval of a replacement sign in order to proceed with more urgent building improvements, and the Master Plan indicates that the construction of any replacement sign in this location would be performed under a separate sign review and permit. Therefore, staff recommends that City Council delegate PC District review authority for any replacement sign to the City Planning Commission so that it can be reviewed administratively, along with the permitting authority BSEED. If City Council does not wish to delegate this authority to CPC, the applicant may pursue this replacement sign later as part of another PC District review.



August 2021 Google Streetview of Removed Pole Sign



October 2022 Staff Photo of Removed Sign Location

4. Niches. Masonry infill in two locations on the west façade (facing Hart Plaza) is proposed to be removed at original building openings. A new glass fiber reinforced cast niche is proposed for the display of statues by the owner. Details of the statues were not provided.
5. Additional improvements include: relocating the existing historic marker facing East Jefferson Avenue to the northeast corner of the site, removal of existing foundation plantings along the north side of the building, removal of concrete near the sign that has been removed

and concrete leading to the south and west facades, the addition of decorative metal screens for existing air conditioner units, cleaning and tuckpointing maintenance of the existing partial height walls along the north and east façades, and maintenance of the stone coping along the east and west façade rooflines and also the existing Mariners’ stone sign to remain.

REVIEW & ANALYSIS

Nonconforming Uses

Mariners’ Church is considered a nonconforming use as “religious institutions”, which is the specific land use term for churches, are not permitted as a by-right or conditional use in the PC District. However, the proposed exterior alterations to the nonconforming church use do not fall under the requirements of Section 50-15-26, which requires a public hearing at the Board of Zoning Appeals for expansion or intensification of a nonconforming use. Specifically, Section 50-15-26(2) does not apply as there is no proposed change to the site plan involving a structure. Therefore, as the BZA is not “the body of first jurisdiction” for the PC District based on Section 50-3-225, staff finds that the current request may proceed with CPC review in accordance with Section 50-11-67 PC District review criteria.

PC District Review Criteria

There are eighteen PC District Review Criteria listed in Section 50-11-67 of the Zoning Ordinance. As stated in Section 50-3-225, the purpose of this design review “is to ensure harmony with the Public Center and for consistency with the spirit, intent, and purpose of the Zoning Ordinance.” Criteria that are most applicable to the proposed exterior alterations include:

(3) The proposed development should be compatible with surrounding development in terms of land use, general appearance and function and should not adversely affect the value of adjacent properties.

The proposed changes are minor and should not adversely affect adjacent properties.

(11) Signage and graphics should be tastefully designed to be visually appealing and in character with surrounding development; they should provide needed information, direction and orientation in a clear and concise manner.

Staff recommends that City Council delegate PC District review authority for any replacement sign to the City Planning Commission so that it can be reviewed administratively, along with the permitting authority BSEED. If City Council does not wish to delegate this authority to CPC, the applicant may pursue this replacement sign at a later date as part of another PC District review.

(13) Barrier-free access and public safety features should be carefully planned.

Existing barrier-free access to the church building south entrance would be maintained and does not appear to be impacted by the removal of small portions of concrete areas as these areas are not within the path of building entrances.

(14) Preservation/restoration of buildings having architectural or historic value should be considered a primary objective.

A primary objective of the proposal is to preserve and restore the existing building of high architectural and historic value.

(15) Urban design elements of form and character should be carefully considered; such elements include, but are not limited to: richness/interest of public areas through the provision of storefronts, window displays, landscaping, and artwork; color, texture and quality of structural materials; enclosure of public spaces; variations in scale; squares, plazas and/or “vest pocket parks” where appropriate; continuity of experience, visual activity and interest; articulation and highlighting important visual features; preservation/enhancement of important views and vistas.

The reconstruction of the historic building pinnacles and the addition of niches for sculptures would add important elements to the site that would improve building richness/interest of public areas adjacent to the site, improve visual activity and interest of the building, and the proposed up-lighting would address articulation and highlight important visual features of the building.

Design

The Planning & Development Department supports the requested improvements contained in the Mariner's Church Master Plan. The proposed changes and upgrades make the site more visually appealing and accentuate the unique character of the building through lighting, screening, and use of quality materials that should withstand deterioration over the years.

RECOMMENDATION

CPC staff recommends approval of the proposed exterior modifications to 170 East Jefferson Avenue as detailed in the attached Master Plan and with the following conditions:

1. That final site plans, elevations, landscape, and lighting plans be submitted for City Planning Commission staff approval prior to making application for applicable permits.
2. That City Council delegate PC review and approval authority of any future replacement sign as indicated in this report and the Master Plan to the City Planning Commission for review of a sign that complies with Chapter 4 of the 2019 Detroit City Code. City Planning Commission approval shall be required prior to BSEED granting a sign permit.
3. That written permission by the Michigan Historical Commission be obtained and submitted to BSEED for verification prior to removing and relocating the existing historic marker in accordance with Public Act 10 of 1955.

Respectfully submitted,



Marcell R. Todd, Jr., Director
Eric Fazzini, Staff

- Attachments:
1. Mariners' Church Master Plan dated 3/6/2023
 2. Mariners' Church Site Lighting dated 7/28/2022
 3. P&DD Recommendation Letter dated 6/9/2022
 4. Resolution

- cc:
- Antoine Bryant, Director, PDD
 - Greg Moots, PDD
 - David Bell, Director, BSEED
 - Eric Johnson, BSEED
 - Conrad Mallett, Corp. Counsel, Law
 - Dan Arking, Law
 - Russell Beaver, RB Construction Company (applicant)
 - Thomas Roberts, AIA (architect)