



SR-2 – STAFF ADVISORY REPORT (04-03-2026)

This advisory report, prepared by staff, represents the opinion and advice of professional staff, and does not represent nor direct the separate review and decision of the Historic District Commission. This report serves as an addendum to SR-1, an objective staff summary of the proposal and property.

ADDRESS: 1545 WOODWARD AVENUE

MEETING DATE: 04-08-2026

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2026-00117

SCOPE: REPLACE RECESSED ENTRANCE PLASTER CEILING WITH GYPSUM BOARD CEILING

ADVISORY STAFF REPORT PREPARED BY: A. DYE

STAFF OBJECTIONS TO APPROVAL:

This first section describes itemized conclusions/concerns, which, in staff's professional opinion, would prevent the issue of an unconditional Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). "None" means staff has no objections and believes a COA is warranted, with no conditions. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

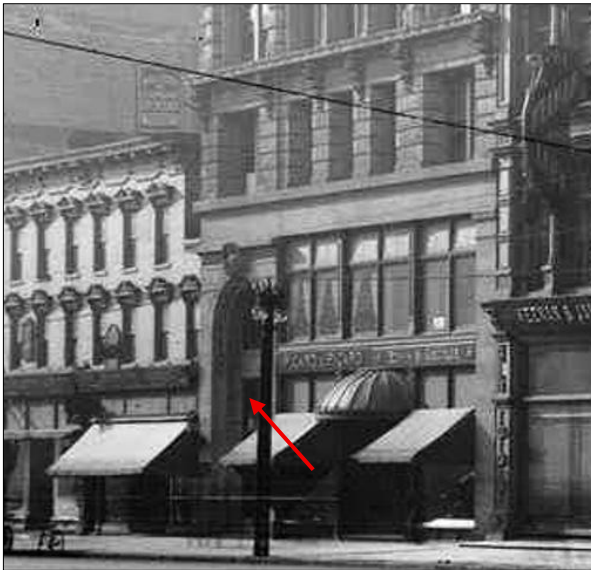
1. The design and detailing of the ceiling, as well as the arched panel with the "H" for Himelhoch's, reflects the highly popular classical revival style of the early 1920s, and is a distinctive, character-defining historic feature that likely dates to the time of Himelhoch's opening in this building and is within the district's Period of Significance.
2. The proposal, which seeks to remove the character-defining feature and install an unadorned gypsum board ceiling, would alter the features and spaces that characterize the property.
3. The applicant states that the restoration of the plaster ceiling would be \$125,000 - \$150,000, an amount which does not include structural repair, insulation replacement or condition investigation. However, this price quote was not provided as part of a complete scope of work, including a detailed conditions assessment coupled with photos to substantiate the construction of this feature, the damage that has occurred, the effect on the feature should it be repaired, nor documentation of structural and plumbing conditions that would necessitate the complete removal of the historic feature.
4. The economic infeasibility for the installation of a new plaster ceiling, matching the design, color, texture, other visual qualities and materials has not been proven, as the importance of the feature, its integrity, location (i.e., how critical it is to the historic character of the building) and cost of the project relative to the size/scale of the building and its economic viability must be considered and presented to the Commission for review.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

This second section expands on the reasoning and analysis leading to staff's conclusions given in the first section above. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

Washington Arcade Building: 1901 - 1921

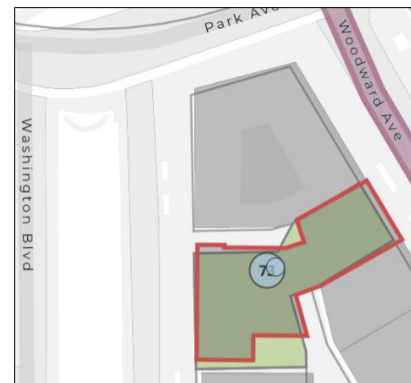
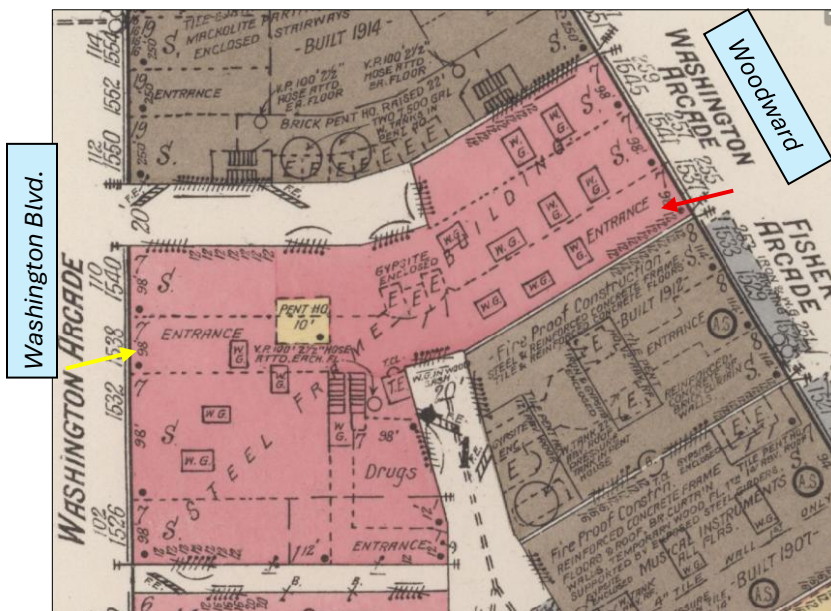
- The subject building is the Washington Arcade building that was built as an investment by Col. Frank J. Hecker. Erected in 1901, the building was designed by the Detroit firm Donaldson and Meier Architects.



Undated photo of the Woodward Avenue façade of the Washington Arcade building (center). Burton Collection. Staff dates the photo ca. 1901 – 1911 due to the 3-story 19th-century building (erected prior to 1884) to the left/south. The 3-story building was replaced by the 8-story Fisher Arcade building in 1912.



Undated postcard of the Washington Boulevard façade and entrance of the Washington Arcade building. Burton Collection.

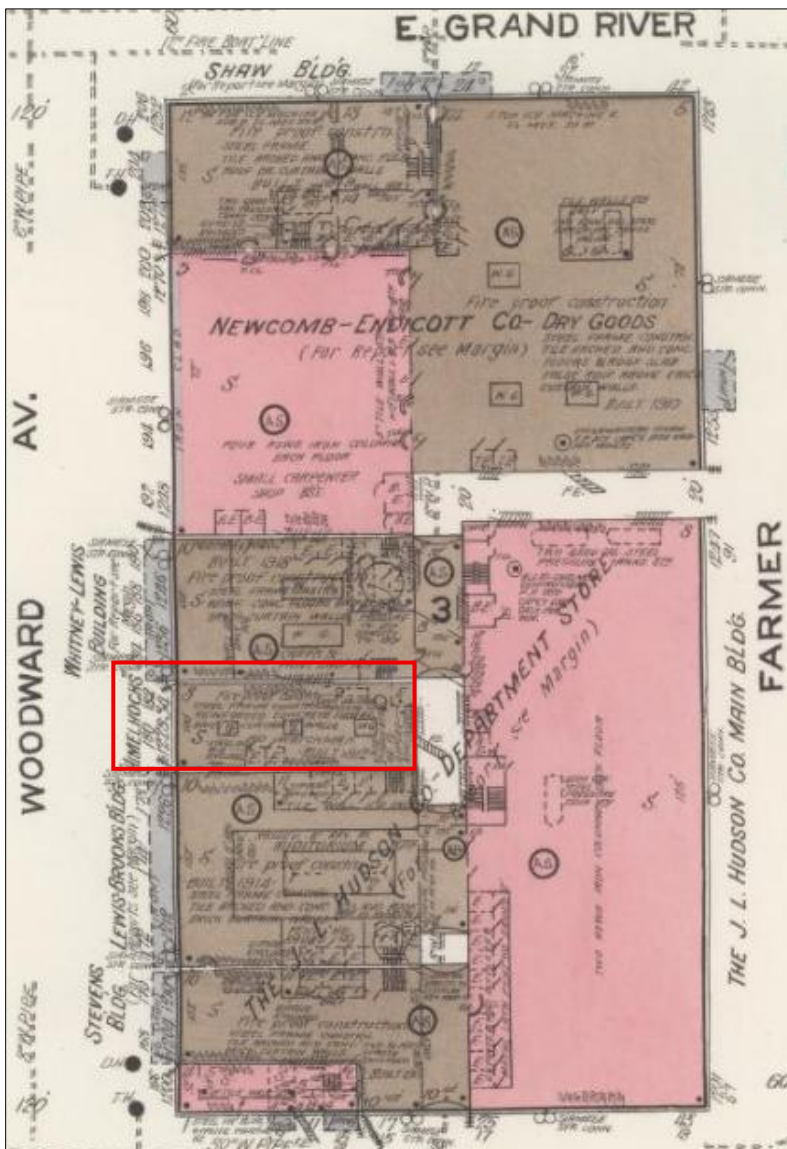


Above: Map of 1545 Woodward, outlined in red, and directly south of the David Whitney Building. Base Unit Tools.

Left: Vol. 2, 1921 Sanborn Map. This drawing shows the footprint of the interior arcade that originally connected the building's two entrances (yellow arrows), as well as the locations of the Woodward and Washington Boulevard entrances (as shown on the above photo and postcard).

Himelhoch History: 1907 – 1923

- According to the Detroit Historical Society website: *Himelhoch's was a women's high-fashion department store originally located in the small town of Caro, Michigan. However, the store's founder, Wolf Himelhoch, a Jewish immigrant from the Kurland Province in Latvia, decided to move the store to downtown Detroit in 1907. He recognized the demand for high-end women's fashion in Detroit; the wives of automobile executives were shopping at high-end department stores like Russeks and Saks in New York and wanted to find a similar shopping experience locally. The new Himelhoch's location was 1230 Woodward Avenue, next to Hudson's Department Store and across the street from B. Siegel.*
- Himelhoch's original Detroit location was 1230-1234 Woodward, on the east side of Woodward between Gratiot and Grand River. Within a few years at this location, Himelhoch's witnessed Hudson's department store expanding from Farmer Street to include frontage on Woodward Avenue.



Vol. 3 Sanborn Map, 1921. Himelhoch's building, boxed out in red, was eight stories tall and two bays wide.

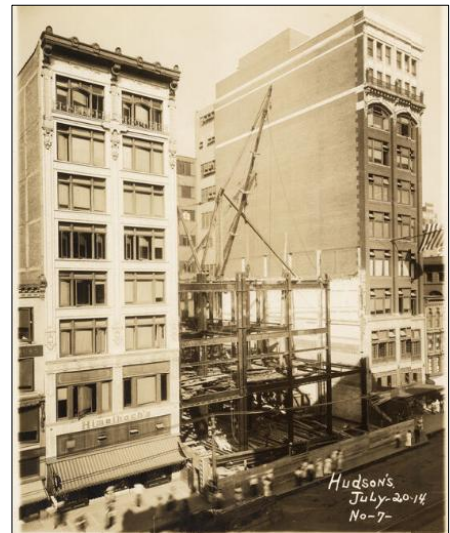
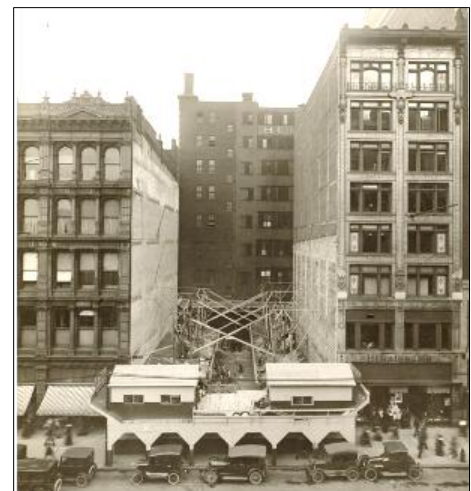


Photo dated 07/20/1914 of Hudson's expansion onto Woodward Avenue (center), directly south of Himelhoch's (left), replacing the Lewis-Brooks Building. Burton Collection.



Undated photo of Himelhoch's (far right) and Hudson's expansion (center), where the Whitney-Lewis Building had stood. The Sanborn Map lists this section of Hudson's as being erected in 1918.



Above: April 1921 photo shows completed Hudson expansion on either side of Himelhoch's. Burton Collection.

- On August 18, 1922, *The Detroit Free Press* announced that Himelhoch's had leased the Washington Arcade building for the location of its new store.
- On January 14, 1922, Himelhoch advertised in *The Detroit Free Press* a sale on all its merchandise in advance of closing its 1230-1243 Woodward store.
- On January 21, 1923, Himelhoch's announced the hiring of Albert Kahn as the designer to complete the alterations to 1545 Woodward for their retail use.

ARCADE ACQUIRED BY HIMELHOCH'S

Woodward Avenue Building to Be Remodeled.

The Washington arcade, for a generation one of the places where folks were wont to take their country cousins when they were showing to the latter the splendors of the big town, on September 1 will come into the possession of Himelhoch Bros. & Co., specialists in women's and misses' apparel. The company has leased the arcade for a long period of years, and is having it remodeled by Albert Kahn, architect.

The arcade was constructed in 1900 by Colonel Frank J. Hecker. At that time it was something new and an object of curiosity. For two decades it housed the offices of men who had risen to the heights of their professions, and some of the city's smartest shops.

Himelhoch's store is almost as old as the arcade. It was founded in 1907 in a two-story building on the present site of the store at 1230-34 Woodward avenue. The present building was erected in 1911.

With the leasing of the arcade Himelhoch's has a property with a 60-foot frontage on Woodward avenue and 100 feet on Washington boulevard.

The new location will provide the Himelhoch store with three times its present space. The present site of the store will come into the possession of the J. L. Hudson company.

Above: August 1922 announcement of Himelhoch's leasing the Washington Arcade building for their new store.

Left: January 1922 ad announcing "liquidation" sale of apparel at Himelhoch's 1230-1234 Woodward store.

Below: January 1923 announcement of Albert Kahn being contracted with the alteration work at the Washington Arcade Building for Himelhoch's.

AY, JANUARY 14, 1922.

The Himelhoch Removal Sale

A RARE OPPORTUNITY TO BUY HIGHEST
GRADE APPAREL AT SUBSTANTIAL SAVINGS

Himelhoch merchandise, to the value of hundreds of thousands of dollars, is selling at the most radical reductions. The entire stock is being closed out to prepare for our occupancy of the Washington Arcade, now undergoing alterations.

THE DESIRABILITY of its offerings is told in the Himelhoch reputation for unimpeachable qualities, and fashions chosen with meticulous care. The assortments are most desirable because there is nothing less than Himelhoch quality in the entire store.

SALE NEWS, PUBLISHED DAILY, mirrors, in one department after another, the type of savings available in all parts of the store. Opportunities are offered which the reader of this may never see again. Included are

WRAPS FURS GOWNS
HOSIERY GLOVES
BLOUSES LINGERIE CORSETS
SPORT WEAR SUITS

*Woodward Between
Parks—Busiest
Thoroughfare
in the World*

Sixty years ago Zachariah Chandler opened a general store and astounded Detroit by doing a \$50,000 business in a single year!

Today a score of stores on the "world's busiest thoroughfare" do many thousands in a single day!

Among these the Himelhoch Store, having built a steadily increasing business for over 15 years, today enjoys a patronage for which its newly chosen larger site—the Washington Arcade—is admirably adapted.

*The fourth of a series of talks about
the New and Greater Himelhoch's.*

plumbing and heating, Leggett, Doll & Foster.

Store: Albert Kahn awarded contracts on the alteration of an office block into a mercantile building, for Himelhoch Brothers as follows; plastering, McNulty Brothers; plumbing, Soffel company; heating, Royal Heating company; electric, Gray Electric company.

Stores: J. Lawson Miller awarded

PART FOUR THE DETROIT FREE PRESS, SUNDAY, APRIL 8, 1923

ARTISTS WHO WILL GIVE TUESDAY MATINEE
Tuesday Matinee Group to Repeat Former Successes



These members of the Detroit Matinee Group have planned a variety program for the afternoon matinee performance. They are, from left to right, Miss Frances Perkins, popular for her impersonation of the first Emperor on the Grand Opera House stage.

Y.W.C.A. Will Have Busy Week of Club Meetings

Miscellaneous Club

Smart Sweaters
For Early Spring

Cutler Shops
 217 West Grand Street
 2119 Woodward St.

Detroit Furniture Shops
Home of Style

Here is an example of the beautifully designed, thoroughly well made furniture which the most discerning of the Detroit Furniture Shop, and without a price tag higher than you are used to pay for the ordinary kind.

The new spring tables come with a choice of either rubber, leather, or cloth, the dining chairs, and our set-backs, in genuine value.

The large square table and the beautiful set table are made of the finest materials in a new design.

Only \$425.00

PICTURE TO OBSERVE



Himmelhochs
 Woodward thru to Washington



A Unique Departure in Store Interior Decoration
 An Interview with Rachel E. de Wolf Raseman
 By Marion Holden

Rachel E. de Wolf Raseman, the interior decorator, is a woman, young, nervous, busy, and a creature of habit. When Rachel is one of the "W's" who go to the other end, she has her work in the large store.

"It was a big job," she assured me, "and a wonderful one. You see, for a good many years the Himmelhoch Brothers have cherished an ideal for their establishment which would raise it beyond the commercial to a plane where beauty and utility should go hand in hand. The new building embodies this dream. It will stand unique in downtown Detroit, for nothing like it has been attempted here. It will convey to a discriminating clientele a charm, a buoyancy, a savoir faire not usually associated with buying and selling. One thinks of Paris—"

"But how, exactly, has this been accomplished?" I wanted to know.

"Well, there's the building itself. The richness of the plastic, elliptical vaulted ceiling over the Woodward Avenue Entrance, sets a precedent established in the interior. Your mind leaps to the days when Florentine culture ruled all Italy, when art was an integral part of people's daily lives.


The Lounge

The French Room

The Millinery Salons

The Sports Shop

Himmelhochs
 Woodward thru to Washington



A Unique Departure in Store Interior Decoration
 An Interview with Rachel E. de Wolf Raseman
 By Marion Holden

"It was a big job," she assured me, "and a wonderful one. You see, for a good many years the Himmelhoch Brothers have cherished an ideal for their establishment which would raise it beyond the commercial to a plane where beauty and utility should go hand in hand. The new building embodies this dream. It will stand unique in downtown Detroit, for nothing like it has been attempted here. It will convey to a discriminating clientele a charm, a buoyancy, a savoir faire not usually associated with buying and selling. One thinks of Paris—"

"But how, exactly, has this been accomplished?" I wanted to know.

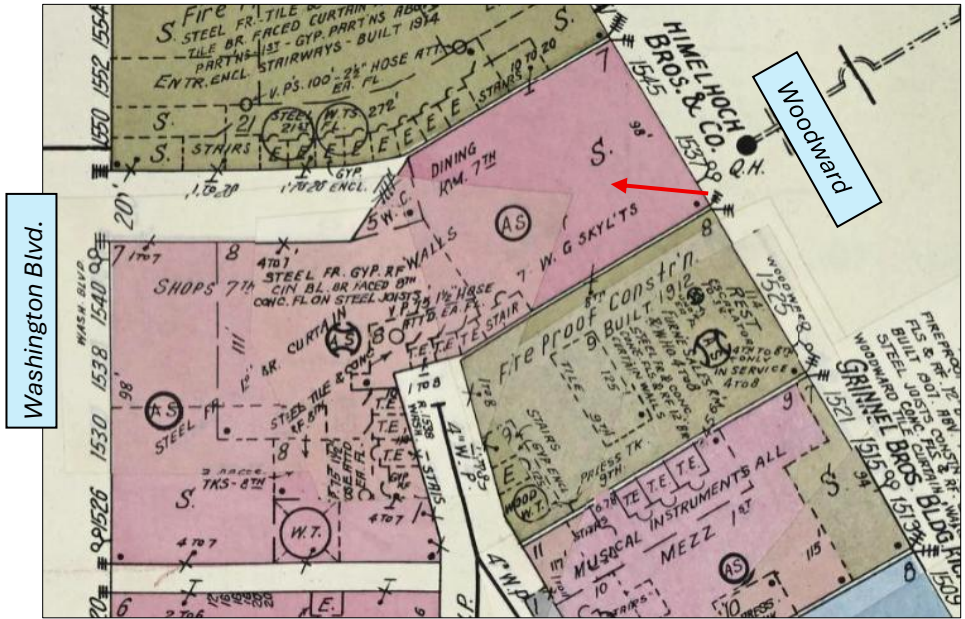
"Well, there's the building itself. The richness of the plastic, elliptical vaulted ceiling over the Woodward Avenue Entrance, sets a precedent established in the interior. Your mind leaps to the days when Florentine culture ruled all Italy, when art was an integral part of people's daily lives.

Detroit Free Press, April 8, 1923. The rendering, while not identical in design pattern to the final product, displays the overall shape and styling of the existing recessed entrance and barrel-vault ceiling.

The interior designer's description of the Woodward entrance offers evidence of Himmelhoch's design theory for this public-facing entrance as an independent advertisement for the company and the products it sold.

Himelhoch & Washington Arcade Building: 1923 - Present

- When Himelhoch’s opened the doors at their new location, subject of this application, they showcased a newly altered/rehabilitated building designed specifically for mercantile use. The introduction of Himelhoch’s central recessed entrance and extending storefronts were likely part of Kahn’s design to increase display space for merchandise than previously provided by the building’s original flat, three bay wide façade at Woodward.
- The 1921 - 1950 Sanborn map shows the altered interior department store layout, when compared to the 1921 map on page 2.



Vol. 3, Sanborn Map, 1921 – 1950. The original arcade is now gone, and the department store shops and dining room extend to the top/seventh floor. Note the lack of interior partitions.



Undated photo, Burton Collection. The central recessed entrance, per the 1920s alterations discussed above, is visible. The cars identify this photo as being from the early to mid-1950s.



This 1975 photo of Himelhoch's offers a clear view of the company's display windows facing Woodward as well as the outline and size of one of the interior recessed storefronts. Detroit Historical Society.



- Himelhoch's operated in the building from 1923 until 1978. The company's longstanding business at this location, which eventually became its flagship store (having opened eight branch stores over the years), caused the public to identify the building as "The Himelhoch's Building"; the Washington Arcade name long gone.
- In 1982, a \$2.7 million dollar rehabilitation was completed, converting the interior space to 72 senior citizen housing units.
- The existing units in the building remain residential; however, according to a 01/27/2017 *Detroit News* article, at the time of the building's 2017 sale to the current owners, the building included 36 units of affordable senior housing and 36 units renting at market rate.



Staff photo of Woodward façade and entrance, March 20, 2026



1931 photo of Himelhoch's window display at 1545 Woodward. Detroit Historical Society. Based on the reflection of streetlamps on the storefront glass, staff surmises this display was in one of the front-facing storefronts at Woodward Avenue. It is interesting to note the building's interior first floor decorative ceiling visible at the top of the photo in which the storefront's temporary display wall doesn't entirely block from view. This ceiling is similar in design to that of the recessed entrance as shown below (i.e., repeating geometric shape, each with central rosette.)



Staff photo, March 20, 2026, of existing canopy ceiling at 1545 Woodward, subject of this application.

- The design and detailing of the ceiling, as well as the arched panel with the “H” for Himelhoch’s, reflects the highly popular classical revival style of the early 1920s. In staff’s professional opinion, the design and execution of the ornamental ceiling is consistent with 1920s/pre-war installations and is unlikely to have been completed outside of the district’s original period of significance (1886 – 1941). Therefore, it is our conclusion that it is a distinctive, character-defining historic feature that likely dates to the time of Himelhoch’s opening in this building and is within the district’s Period of Significance.
- The distinctive feature, enhanced by the barrel vault shape, echoed the building’s existing opulence and created an enticing atmosphere for this transitional space and entrance to the high-end department store.
- The current scaffolding restricts visibility of the ceiling to a small portion near the Woodward sidewalk. For the Commission to get the full effect of this feature, staff located a YouTube video by “Best Address” (@bestaddress) that was filmed at the Woodward Avenue entrance in October 2025, after the initial damage occurred. The following two photos were clipped from the video. It is clear from the applicant’s recent photos that additional damage was caused by the recent leak; however, these photos still offer a visual clue on the overall design and importance of this distinctive character-defining feature.



Cropped video image, YouTube (@bestaddress). October 2025.



Cropped video image, YouTube (@bestaddress). October 2025.

- The following Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District’s Elements of Design discuss details related to this resource and even notes the subject ceiling, the focus of this application:
 - (6) Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.** *The original arrangement of storefront windows and recessed entrances creates a pattern along the street. The placement of original entrances on individual façades is not consistent, but is dependent on the width of the building and the number of retail spaces entered from the street. The entrance to the Washington Arcade/Himelhoch Building at 1545 Woodward Avenue is deeply recessed beneath a broad arch that provides access to display windows on either side. No façade projections beyond the front lot line exist into the public right-of-way.*
 - (10) Relationship of architectural details.** *Architectural details generally relate to architectural styles. Late 19th Century and early 20th Century buildings exhibit roman arches, cartouches, fluted pilasters, rosettes, and other Classically-derived details. Where they still exist, cornices are richly ornamented with brackets and trim; where cornices have been removed, plain surfaces have replaced them. Other areas of the façade that are frequently ornamented include spandrels beneath windows and between arches, tops of pilasters, and string courses. Storefronts typically have apron walls and transoms.*
 - (22) General environmental character.** *The Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District is an architecturally significant, urban-scaled, late 19th Century and early 20th Century commercial streetscape that, despite modernizations over time, remains intact. It represents a continuum of the City's retailing history that maintains a unique sense of place as the City's Main Street.*
- The ceiling retains its original materials, physical features (including its siting and setting) and decorative details, all of which combine to create its historic character and appearance. Therefore, it is staff’s opinion that the ceiling meets the seven aspects of integrity as characterized by the National Park Service: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.
- The proposal, which seeks to remove the character-defining feature and install an unadorned gypsum board ceiling, would alter the features and spaces that characterize the property. The removal of a distinctive character-defining feature, if determined to be deteriorated beyond repair, per Standard 6, requires that it be replaced with a new feature that shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.
- The applicant states, and offered an additional statement by the CIR Group, that the structural integrity of the metal framing is in question and requires its complete removal in order to adequately repair the underlying structural and plumbing issues.
- The applicant further stated in a 03/30 email to staff that the restoration of the plaster ceiling would be \$125,000 - \$150,000, which amount does not according to the applicant, include the cost of the structural repair, insulation replacement or condition investigation. However, this price quote was not provided as part of a complete scope of work, including a detailed conditions assessment coupled with photos to substantiate the construction of this feature, the damage that has occurred, the effect on the feature should it be repaired, nor documentation of structural and plumbing conditions that would necessitate the complete removal of the historic feature.
- For the proposed gypsum board ceiling, the applicant states the cost will be \$30,000 - \$35,000, but it isn’t clear if this price includes structural repair, insulation replacement or condition investigation.
- The applicant supplied a photo of the adjacent Fisher Building’s entrance as an example of the proposed finished appearance proposed for Himelhoch’s. Staff notes that the Fisher Building barrel-vaulted recessed entrance ceiling was a reconstruction of a missing feature. Therefore, that project needed to meet Standard 9, in which new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment. This is an entirely different set of circumstances than

what is present at Himelhoch’s and cannot be used as a comparable end result.



June, 2011



Fisher Building - Google Street View

November, 2024

- The economic infeasibility for the installation of a new plaster ceiling, matching the design, color, texture, other visual qualities and materials has not been proven, as the importance of the feature, its integrity, location (i.e., how critical it is to the historic character of the building) and cost of the project relative to the size/scale of the building and its economic viability must be considered and presented to the Commission for review.

Unapproved Work – Woodward Avenue facade

- During staff’s recent site visit and research for this application, it was noticed that the Woodward Avenue lettering: HIMELHOCH BROTHERS AND COMPANY, is no longer in place above the Woodward Avenue recessed entrance, as well as the panels and brass component above the arched entrance had been painted black, both of these work items were not included in the staff-issued 2020 COA (20-6621) for the façade restoration and storefront replacement.
- Staff also noted an earlier unapproved work item, which occurred between June 2009 and June 2011 – the replacement of one three-unit window with a four-unit window, distorting the appearance and placement of the ribbon windows and corresponding thin, decorative mullion covers.
- Staff sent a notification to the applicant of these unapproved work items; the applicant hasn’t replied to staff’s inquiry.



Above: June 2009, Google Street View.
Right: Staff photo, March 20, 2026.
Stars denote area of work described above.



STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

This third and final section takes staff's itemized "objections" identified in the first section, and presents them in the form of "conditions" in support of a proposed approval recommendation or "reasons" in support of a proposed denial recommendation, in the form required by Section 21-2-78 of the City Code. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

Section 21-2-78, Determinations of Historic District Commission

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District's Elements of Design, specifically:

- Standard 1) A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.
- Standard 2) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.
- Standard 5) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property shall be preserved.
- Standard 6) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.
- Elements of Design #6, 10 and 22.

For the following reasons;

1. The design and detailing of the ceiling, as well as the arched panel with the "H" for Himelhoch's, reflects the highly popular classical revival style of the early 1920s, and is a distinctive, character-defining historic feature that likely dates to the time of Himelhoch's opening in this building and is within the district's Period of Significance.
2. The proposal, which seeks to remove the character-defining feature and install an unadorned gypsum board ceiling, would alter the features and spaces that characterize the property.
3. The applicant states that the restoration of the plaster ceiling would be \$125,000 - \$150,000, an amount which does not include structural repair, insulation replacement or condition investigation. However, this price quote was not provided as part of a complete scope of work, including a detailed conditions assessment coupled with photos to substantiate the construction of this feature, the damage that has occurred, the effect on the feature should it be repaired, nor documentation of structural and plumbing conditions that would necessitate the complete removal of the historic feature.
4. The economic infeasibility for the installation of a new plaster ceiling, matching the design, color, texture, other visual qualities and materials has not been proven, as the importance of the feature, its integrity, location (i.e., how critical it is to the historic character of the building) and cost of the project relative to the size/scale of the building and its economic viability must be considered and presented to the Commission for review.