



**PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

Coleman A. Young Municipal Center
2 Woodward Avenue, Suite 808
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Phone 313•224•1339
www.detroitmi.gov

SR-2 – ADVISORY STAFF REPORT (08-07-2026)

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: 3418-3426 JOHN R

MEETING DATE: 08-12-2026

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2026-00381

SCOPE: DEMOLISH REAR WALLS, ERECT ADDITION, REHABILITATE THREE UNITS

ADVISORY STAFF REPORT PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

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. There are compatibility concerns regarding the proposed new rear addition in terms of architectural features, materials, and color (and how some of these seem to accentuate the addition's height), in reference to the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Rehabilitation #9.
2. Replacement window product cut sheets and section drawings are provided, but it is not clear whether the cottage-style configuration and proportions are proposed to be preserved, as was the case with the completed units to the south.
3. The submitted materials state that proposed is to "Clean all existing masonry by low-pressure powerwashing and tuckpoint by professional masonry contractor, mortar style/profiles and color to match body (original) on all elevations of work, following clean." The cleaning agent (if any), rinse specifications, and pressure are not specified in the proposal. Photos of any proposed replacement bricks next to historic bricks have not been provided.

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.

- Restoration of missing historic features is proposed, including restoration of the missing balustrade and cornice. Staff finds that this proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation ("the Standards") and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings ("the Guidelines"). Most relevant is Standard 6, which states, "Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or

pictorial evidence.” A historic photo of the building from PDD files is shown below, with an image of the restored cornice and balustrade from a completed development phase.



Undated, historic photo of Patterson Terrace Apartments from PDD’s files. The John R units proposed for rehabilitation are the three units furthest to the left of this image. The fourth John R unit’s doorway (3412 John R) is barely visible here behind the Erskine units, shown to the right of the image. Visible are the building’s cornices and balustrades and cottage-style windows with the upper sashes shorter than the lower.



Staff photo from July 2026 shows the three units proposed for rehabilitation—3426 John R is to the far left, along the alley, 3422 is in the center of the three unfinished units, and 3418 has the sign in its rounded bay window. Completed 3412 John R is visible on the far right of the photo.

Install missing limestone balustrades and
parapet cap match in kind with phase 1
Rebuild brick parapet cap with matching brick



Image and text from the application materials. Shown are the restored parapets, balustrades, and cornices from the earlier, completed development phase. The proposed will match these.

- Low-pressure washing and repointing of historic masonry is proposed. Presuming the proposed mortar color, composition, tooling and joints, and masonry units match the original as proposed, staff finds that the proposed work meets the Standards and Guidelines. More specific details are needed for staff to confirm that the proposed cleaning work meets Detroit's Masonry Cleaning Guidelines.
- Aluminum-clad wood windows that match adjacent completed townhomes are proposed. In the historic photo from PDD's files above, it is clear that the windows along John R and Erskine were cottage-style windows with the upper sash shorter than the lower sash. The replacement windows in the rehabilitated units to the south retain this configuration. Presuming that the windows along the John R façade will retain this configuration as well, staff finds that the replacement windows meet the Standards and Guidelines for sashes that are missing or are too deteriorated to be repaired. Typically, applications for the replacement of historic windows must include documentation showing that the historic windows are beyond repair. In this case, however, the property suffered a fire and staff has previously recommended to the Commission that wood elements subjected to fire are categorically beyond repair.
- The north wall, along the alley, is proposed to receive rectangular windows in the arched openings, as the east wall of the completed units along Erskine did. There are dark-painted boards infilling the rounded openings above the rectangular window sashes. Staff does not find that this treatment diminishes the historic character of this building on these secondary, more utilitarian elevations.



Staff photo, July 2026 shows the north wall, along the alley. These arched openings are to receive rectangular windows, and some of these openings are proposed to be reduced. Additionally, the bay window shown on the red brick portion of the wall is proposed for removal.

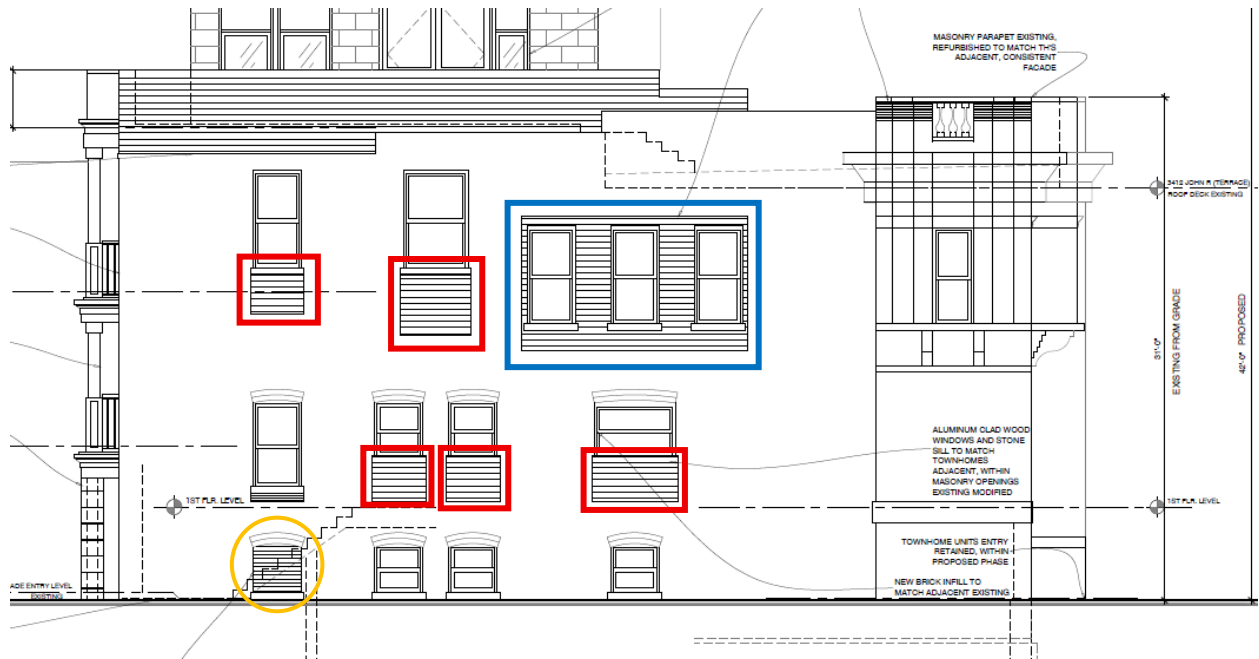


Staff photo, July 2026, shows replaced windows and doors that are rectangular units in rounded openings on the east side of the rehabilitated units on Erskine, south of the scope area. On these secondary, red-brick elevations, staff does not find that these rectangular units in rounded openings diminish the building's historic character.

- Also proposed on the north wall along the alley is to: (1) remove the bay window at the second floor to replace it with three individual windows, not in a bay; (2) infill brick around where the bay window had been; and (3) to infill one basement window opening, to partially infill three first-floor window openings to reduce their heights, and to partially infill two second-floor windows to reduce their heights. Staff finds that the building's red-brick walls are secondary instead of primary. The north wall, along the alley, is quite visible from further north on John R, but staff still considers the wall to be secondary. The Guidelines state that it is not recommended to change the number or size "of windows on primary or highly-visible elevations which will alter the historic character of the building." Staff acknowledges that the north wall is highly visible, but, presuming that salvaged brick from the proposed demolition or matching brick can be used for the infill, staff does not find that the proposed alterations will alter the historic character of the building.



The bay window on the north wall, along the alley, (from below) that is proposed for removal. It is currently covered in metal siding that looks like brick. (Staff photo, July 2026)



The proposed north wall alterations, from applicant's materials. Five windows on the second and first floors above the basement are proposed to be reduced in height and infilled with bricks (red outlines), and the bay window is proposed to be removed and infilled with bricks around three replacement windows not in a bay (blue outline). A basement window is proposed to be infilled as well (outlined in yellow). (From the application materials with staff mark-ups.)

- Also proposed is to demolish the rear and some side walls of 3422 and 3418 John R and to demolish some of the rear wall of 3426 John R as well, all behind the historic façade along John R. This proposed demolition would make room for a large rear addition.
- The application explains that a fire severely damaged the historic building north of the rehabilitated units; as a result, much of the construction associated with the rehabilitation of the John R units will be new construction. (The primary historic facades exist and will be restored, but the units behind the façades are fire damaged, mostly without roofs, and have been exposed to weather for many years.) The application materials state, "The front façade [along John R] is still present because of perpendicular masonry walls that provide lateral support," and the materials state that included in the scope of work is to "remove all existing structurally unsound masonry rear walls and portion of the masonry tenant separation walls." According to the records that BSEED maintains, staff found that an Emergency Demolition Order was issued for 3418 John R in 2012 with a comment noting that the roof and floor collapsed, and the Order of Demolition was removed in 2023. The records show several Dangerous Building complaints and Property Maintenance inspections for the other two units (3422 and 3426 John R) starting about 2010.
- Proposed is not simply to rebuild the units as they are. Instead, units 3418, 3422, and 3426 are being reimagined to be enlarged so that the rear walls would be rebuilt further east, and the units would each have: single-car garages, a second- and third-floor balcony, and a rooftop addition to enable access to private rooftop space.



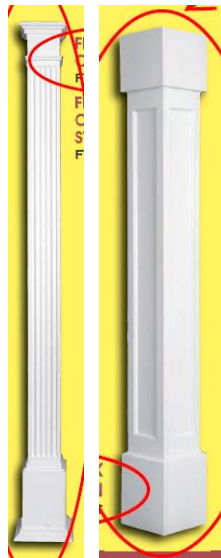
Existing conditions, rear (east ends) of the units from the alley (from the northeast). The units to the left with metal guardrails around the roofs have been rehabilitated. Discrete volumes for each unit and the inconsistently-sized footprints of each unit are visible. Proposed is to remove the rear and side walls of 3418 and 3422 (and some of 3426) visible here and create one large volume that would span the approximate space between the two yellow vertical lines. The new rear addition would be quite visible from the alley. (Staff photo, July 2026, with staff labels)



Existing conditions, east side of the easternmost rehabilitated unit on Erskine, from the southeast, on Erskine. Visible is the balcony and, to the north at the alley end of the site, is the east end of 3426 John R with a large black screen at the third floor. The space between this Erskine unit with the balcony and the east end of 3426 John R would be filled with the large proposed new addition. (Staff photo, July 2026)



Proposed addition, east elevation, from the application materials. The east side of the Erskine-facing units with the balcony and shrubs is to the left and the alley and the retained brick wall of 3426 are to the far right. Between the two historic-age red brick walls is the new proposed four-story addition. The addition has white limestone cladding at the fourth floor, aluminum windows and doors in Dark Bronze and polyurethane posts at the third- and second-floor balconies, and dark gray glass-and-black garage doors and limestone-clad piers at the ground level.



Smooth limestone veneer cladding in French White for garage piers and base and for all sides of the proposed new rooftop addition (left). Polyurethane post covers for the second- and third-floor balconies: proposed is the fluted post cover (center left) to sit atop the recessed box pedestal (center right). Balcony railings on second- and third-floor balconies are proposed to be modeled after this existing balcony railing.

- The existing historic-age rear portions of 3418, 3422, and 3426 John R are simple and utilitarian in red brick. They are unadorned and leave no doubt that the west and south sides, along John R and Erskine, are intended to be the building's primary facades, with their

balustrades, buff or gray brick, bay windows, towers, decorative stone bands, and arched entrances.

- The proposed rear addition is not only larger and taller than the historic-age, discrete, rear volumes are, but it is also very ornamental. The proposed limestone cladding, fluted and recessed post wraps, and ornate balcony railings all above the patterned garage doors, combine for a large and highly decorated rear addition.
- Because the fire-damaged volumes behind the John R historic facades are structurally unstable and require demolition, new construction will be needed to rehabilitate the three fire-damaged units. The Standards (specifically Standard 9) would require that the new construction would not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. As stated, staff finds these rear-facing red brick portions of the three units to be simple and unadorned. A building's plain, industrial aspect can define that building's historic character of course, but in this case, because the modest area in question is on the rear of an elegantly detailed building that has two primary facades that are distinctive, historic, and character defining and the rear is visible from the alley, adjacent backyards, and partially from Erskine, it is staff's opinion that the rear, red-brick volumes of 3418 and 3422 (and a portion of 3426) are not as character-defining as the primary (John R and Erskine) facades are. As the National Park Service's guidance regarding cumulative effect states (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/taxincentives/cumulative-effect-and-historic-character.htm>): "The amount of change to features and spaces that can be accommodated within the Standards will vary according to the roles they play in establishing the character of the property... the components of a property can be seen as falling into a continuum of importance. The more important a feature or space is to the historic character of a property, the less it can be changed without damaging the character as a whole. On the other hand, aspects less critical to the historic character may be altered more substantially with less effect on the character of the building as a whole." Applying this cumulative effect interpretation in this specific case, staff finds that the proposed demolition of portions of the red brick volumes behind the John R historic façade would not be destroying historic materials that characterize the property, meeting Standard 9.
- Standard 9 continues, "The 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." Staff finds that the proposed new construction's height, architectural features, color, and materials are not compatible with the historic integrity of this property and its environment. Building a rear wall that is simpler and more utilitarian than the primary facades of a building was a common historic building practice. The historic-age rear portions of this building are indeed simpler and more utilitarian than the elegantly detailed primary elevations. Demolishing modest, discrete, red-brick rear volumes that tucked behind the primary elevations in order to build in their places one large volume that has fluted and recessed box columns, limestone cladding, ornate balcony rails, and that is one story taller than the historic building does not, in staff's opinion, meet the compatibility requirement of Standard 9.

The Guidelines state that it is recommended to consider "the attached exterior addition both in terms of the new use and the appearance of other buildings in the historic district or neighborhood. Design for the new work may be contemporary or may reference design motifs from the historic building. In either case, it should

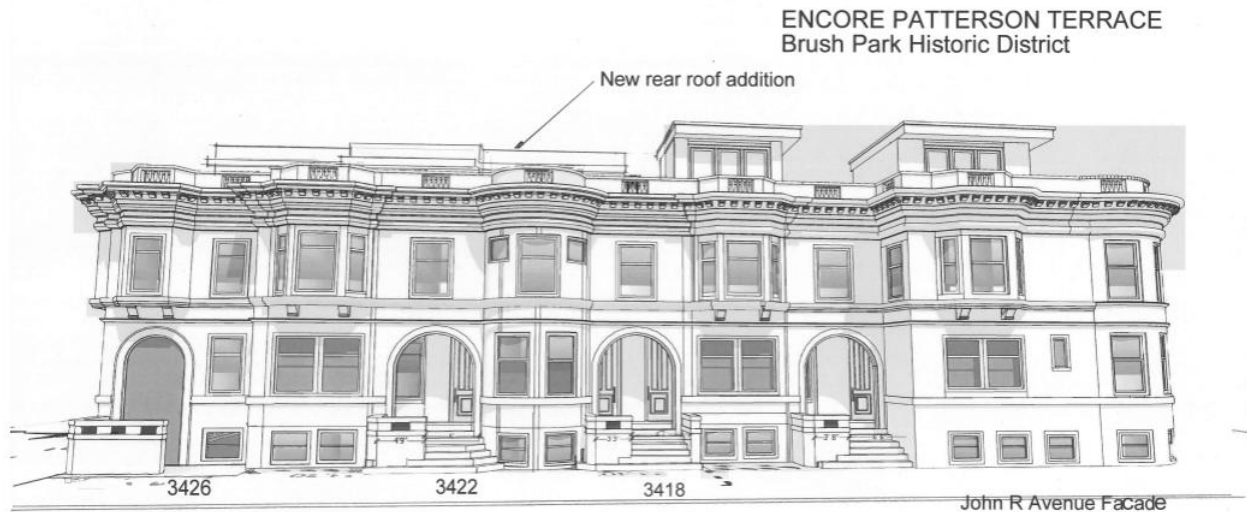
always be clearly differentiated from the historic building and be compatible in terms of mass, materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color.” They also state that it is recommended to place “new additions such as balconies...on non-character-defining elevations and limiting the size and scale in relationship to the historic building.” The 2017 updated Guidelines state that it is not recommended to construct a “rooftop addition on low-rise, one- to three-story historic buildings that is highly visible, overwhelms the building, and negatively impacts the historic district.” The updated Guidelines also state that it is recommended to ensure “that the addition is subordinate and secondary to the historic building and is compatible in massing, scale, materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color.”

It is staff’s opinion that the proposed new addition is on a secondary elevation, but that it is slightly too tall for the historic building, and that the materials, architectural features, and color are not compatible. There are some limestone-clad buildings on the blocks surrounding the subject building, but the stone is more tan/beige than the proposed product appears (it appears to staff as a fairly bright white), and staff did not observe any similar product that is applied stone tiles. Because this is a rear elevation, it is staff’s opinion that the balcony post designs should be simpler and a non-plastic product (it will be viewed close-up, and even from the ground, the viewer won’t be far away), and that the balcony railings should be simpler. These modifications to the design could help ensure that the rear addition is secondary and subordinate to the historic building. Staff does not find that the proposed rooftop addition overwhelms the building, but the addition does seem tall to staff. The reduction of some height and detailing at the parapet line could help the addition look more in scale with the rear of the building and less visible from the front.

- Standard 10 states, “New additions...shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.” It is staff’s opinion that demolishing the historic rear volumes of the John R units and replacing them with one large volume that integrates directly with the historic first-floor, front rooms that remain, without the use of a separating hyphen between the old and new portions, does not meet Standard 10.
- Considering the proposed rear addition in terms of Brush Park’s Elements of Design:
 - (1) Height. “In the area between Woodward Avenue and Brush, the original development was almost exclusively 2½ story houses. Later changes included the construction of apartment buildings among the houses, the majority of which are three stories in height.” The Element notes that “buildings more than four stories in height are located between Woodward Avenue and John R, and generally on or immediately adjacent to buildings on those streets. East of Brush, the original development ranged from one to 2½ stories. Later redevelopment includes apartment buildings not more than four stories tall, most often located on Brush.” Staff finds that the historic apartment building in question is three stories tall and has a decidedly horizontal orientation. It spreads itself out along two streetfronts and its balustrades, cornices, decorative stone bands, and heavy horizontal lines in the historic windows all emphasize the horizontal. To staff, adding a fourth full story seems tall for this building and for the nearby neighborhood.
 - (7) Relationship of materials. “By far the most prevalent material in the

district is common brick; other forms of brick, stone and wood trim are common; wood is used as a structural material only east of Brush. Some later buildings have stucco wall surfaces.” The building in question’s addition proposes stone veneer tiles that look similar to blocks. Staff did observe some smooth stone cladding in tan or beige in the neighborhood surrounding the subject property, but staff did not observe stone that looked like blocks or tile, and did not observe any that was quite bright white.

- (9) Relationship of colors. “Brick red predominates, both in the form of natural color brick and in the form of painted brick. Other natural brick and stone colors are also present. These relate to painted woodwork in various colors, and there is an occasional example of stained woodwork.” Removing the brick red building volumes behind the primary John R façade and replacing them with an addition clad in white limestone tiles, dark aluminum, and glass is removing a predominant color, material, and texture in the district, and replacing it with a whitish stone cladding that staff did not observe in the neighborhood. Using a stone cladding that is a more natural stone color or a material that looks closer to the color of brick perhaps would be more aligned with the district’s Elements of Design.
 - (20) Orientation, vistas, overviews. “Garages and coach houses are located in the rear of residential properties and are generally oriented to the alley.” The proposed addition does not follow this pattern. In this case, a more suburban form is being proposed, with the attached garage under the balconies.
- Staff notes that the rooftop additions that were approved on this building by the Historic District Commission in 2017 in an earlier project phase were smaller and individual additions, as opposed to the combined, three-unit rooftop addition proposed in this application. Staff also notes that the larger addition currently being proposed would be located much further back on the roof than some rooftop additions now in place, and, as a result, would not be as visible from John R as the rooftop additions at 3412 John R and at the corner of John R and Erskine, for example. On August 4, the applicant provided a drawing of the proposed addition in place as viewed from John R and the addition was visible but not as visible as 3412 John R, for example. Staff posted the drawing to the website and copied it below:



Applicant's drawing of completed west façade of 3418-3426 John R. The proposed rooftop addition is just visible.

- Staff notes that the proposed restoration and repair work (including to the masonry and the front stoops) will follow the Brush Park Historic District's Elements of Design, since the proposed work will support historic materials and original design intention.
- Finally, it is important to recall more from the National Park Service's guidance about how to evaluate proposed changes to a building in terms of their cumulative effect. According to the guidance, "A project meets the Standards when the overall effect of all work on the property is one of consistency with the property's historic character....Each property exhibits a unique set of conditions; thus, the evaluation of any single aspect of the proposed work can only be made in the context of those conditions and all the other work that constitutes the project. In some cases, a single aspect of a project may not be consistent with recommendations found in the Guidelines, yet its impact on the character of the property as a whole is small enough that the overall project meets the Standards." The guidance continues, "The amount of change to features and spaces that can be accommodated within the Standards will vary according to the roles they play in establishing the character of the property...(A)spects less critical to the historic character may be altered more substantially with less effect on the character of the building as a whole." In this case, although staff finds the height of the proposed addition tall for the historic building, staff finds that: the addition is less noticeable on the primary façade than it is on the rear, in line with the cumulative effect guidance, and the reduction of some height and detailing at the parapet line could help the addition look more in scale with the rear of the building and even less visible from the John R side.
- Staff also suggests that this property's "unique set of conditions" is worth noting. A unit of this contributing resource to the district was almost demolished for public safety reasons in 2012 but because the building is in a local historic district and because the City invested resources to gain control of the property and sell it to the developer of the neighboring Patterson Terrace properties along Erskine, this significant historic building as a whole is proposed to be rehabilitated from its current state (partially a shell) to a complete, livable building again. It is staff's opinion that it is worthwhile to accommodate a marketable rehabilitation in order to preserve this critically important building and to return it to service.

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: Certificate of Appropriateness**

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Brush Park Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

1. The applicant will propose an alternate cladding material and color to more closely reflect the district's Elements of Design and the nearby context in terms of architectural features, materials, and color; the applicant will revise the detailing at the parapet line of the rooftop addition to de-emphasize the addition's height; the applicant will propose simpler balcony posts (in a material other than polyurethane); and the applicant will propose a simpler balcony guardrail, all for staff review and approval, with the goal that the rear addition/rooftop addition will be simplified and more deferential to the historic primary facades.
2. Where historic windows had a cottage-style configuration, that configuration and those proportions will be preserved in any replacements.
3. For masonry cleaning, the cleaning agent (if any), rinse specifications, and proposed pressure will be shared with staff for review and approval. Photos of proposed replacement bricks next to historic bricks will be provided for staff review and approval. Mortar composition, color, joints, and tooling will match historic.