

**STAFF REPORT 12-9-2020 REGULAR MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG**

**ADDRESS: 440 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., BLVD**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN AND CASS-DAVENPORT HISTORIC DISTRICTS**

**PROPERTY OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT**

**SPONSORING CITY AGENCY/AUTHORITY: HRD (CITY OF DETROIT HOUSING AND REVITALIZATION DEPARTMENT)**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 12/4/20**

**PROPOSED SCOPE: ERECT NEW BUILDING ADJACENT TO HISTORIC DISTRICTS  
(ADVISORY OPINION PER SECTION 21-2-5)**

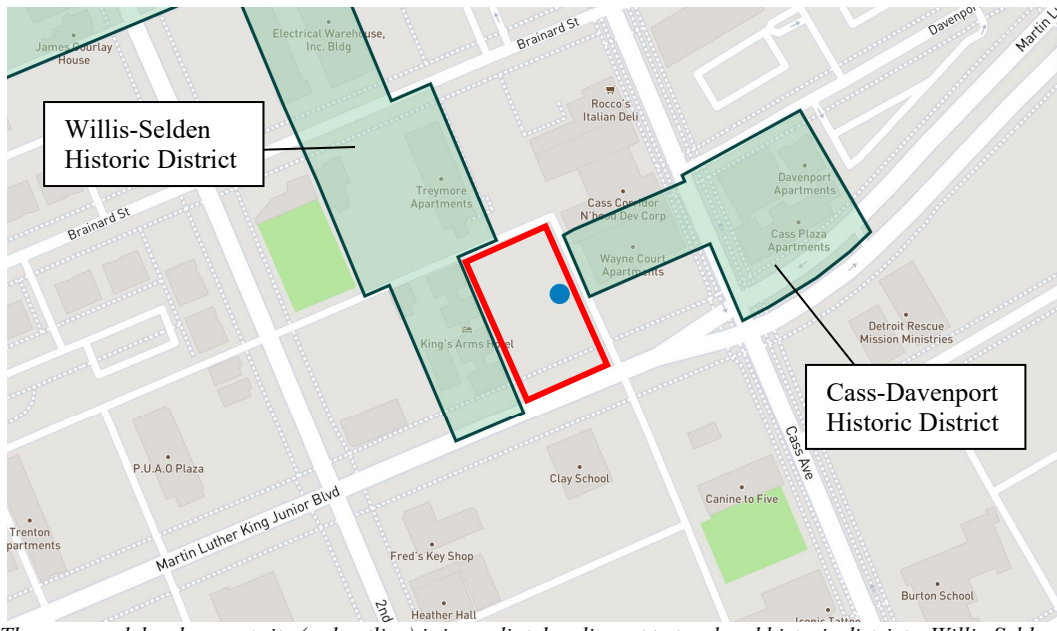


*View towards the northwest showing vacant parcels proposed for development, and adjacent Kings Arm Hotel building, a contributing resource to the Willis-Selden Historic District.. Staff photo, 12/4/2020.*

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The proposed physical development project will be erected on three contiguous vacant parcels at Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard between Cass and Second Avenue, directly east of the King's Arms Hotel (470 MLK, Jr.), across the east alley from the rear of the Wayne Court Apartments (3523 Cass) and across the north alley from the rear of the Treymore Apartments (457 Brainard). The development site is bounded by MLK, Jr. Blvd., to the south, the Cass alley to the east, the King's Arms Hotel building to the west, and the MLK, Jr. Blvd./Brainard Street alley to the north. The site is adjacent to two local historic districts of which the above mentioned buildings are contributing resources: the Willis-Selden district immediately to the west, and the Cass-Davenport district across the alley to the east.

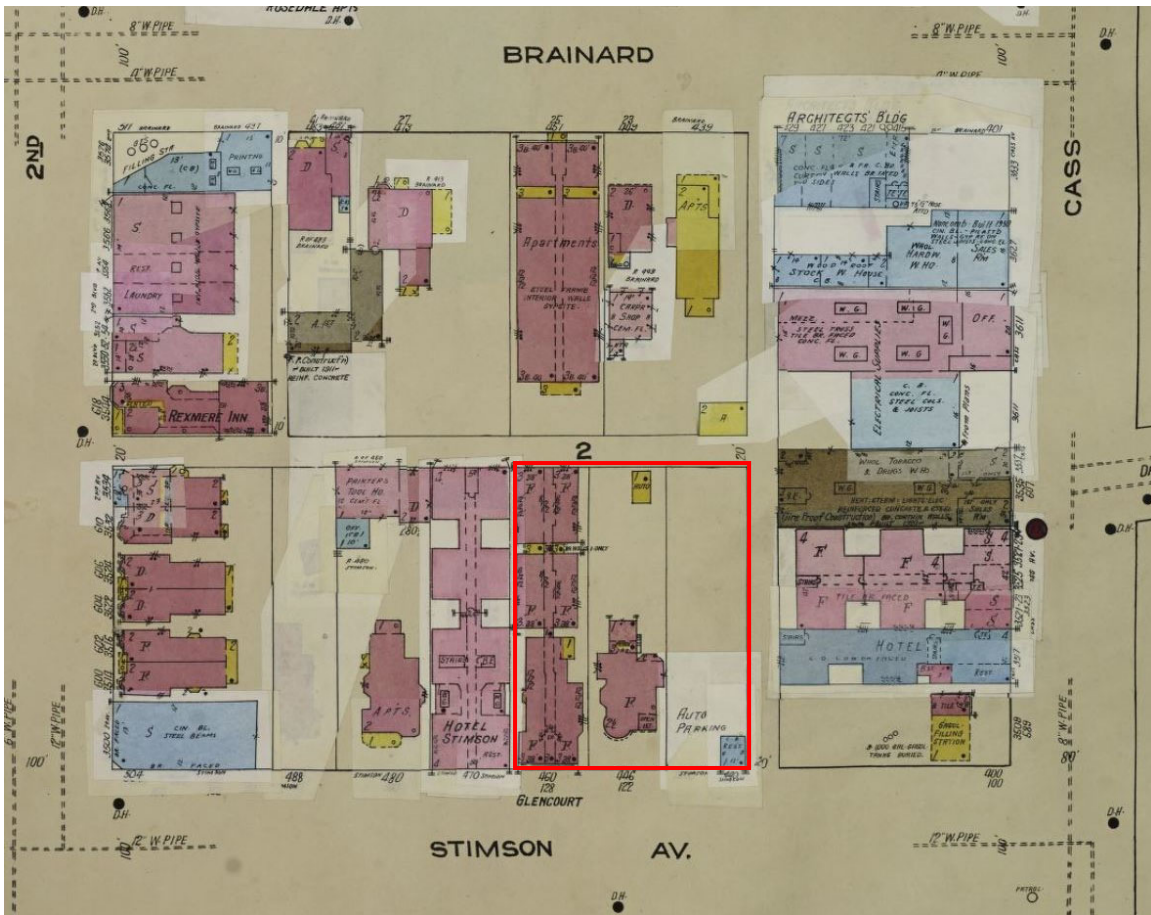
Currently a large vacant lot with a lawn and some overgrown trees, brush, and debris at the rear alley, the site is prominently situated on the busy Martin Luther King, Jr. corridor, a main artery through the Cass Corridor and/or Midtown. The adjacent King's Arms building is vacant but apparently in good condition. It is a large, 4-story apartment/hotel building faced in brown brick with a front façade featuring multiple arched openings ornamented in stone. It extends the full length of its parcel from MLK Jr. Blvd. to the alley north of the site.



*The proposed development site (red outline) is immediately adjacent to two local historic districts: Willis-Selden to the west and Cass-Davenport to the east. Local Historic Districts Map Viewer, City of Detroit.*



*Aerial view of historic context. Development site, composed of three parcels, is outlined in red. Image from Motor City Mapping.*



1951 Sanborn map of vicinity. The King's Arms is indicated as the Hotel Stimson (prior to the widening of Mack/MLK, Jr., the street was Stimson Avenue). Buildings (no longer extant) on the proposed development site (red outline) include another apartment building, a brick mansion converted to flats, and an auto parking lot.



Front elevation view of the King's Arms Hotel (former Hotel Stimson), looking north. Staff photo, December 4, 2020.



*View of development site, looking north as seen from MLK Jr. sidewalk. Rear elevations of the Treymore Apartments (upper left) and Wayne Court Apartments (at right, along alley) are visible. Staff photo, December 4, 2020.*



*Reverse view of site looking southwest from alley. Staff photo, December 4, 2020.*



*View of site from north alley, with downtown visible in the center distance. Staff photo, December 4, 2020.*



*View of site from MLK, Jr., towards the west. Staff photo, December 4, 2020.*

## **PROPOSAL**

The proposal for your Body's advisory review, per the conceptual design package attached, includes the following:

- Erection of a 4-story, 45' tall multi-family apartment building. The main mass of the building will be oriented towards the corner of the east alley and MLK, Jr. Blvd, with the primary façade along the Boulevard. A parking lot is proposed for the western third of the parcel, immediately adjacent to the King's Arms, to be accessed by a curb cut from MLK, Jr. Blvd.
- The proposed building will be executed in a modern yet restrained design, featuring composite panel metal siding (vertically-oriented) as the main expression of the building, with a light colored cast stone base at the first story. Rectangular projecting bays composed of dark modular brick laid in a running bond flanked by small balconies arranged in a regular pattern will punctuate the façade. Windows and door openings are vertically oriented. A prefinished metal coping system will crown the bays and the main structure.
- At the corner with the alley and MLK, Jr. Blvd., the main entrance will be marked with a metal-clad canopy and a cast stone triangular arch/bay rising to the height of the other bays. A concrete plaza will expand the sidewalk in this area.
- A masonry screen wall and trash alcove will be positioned along the east alley, set back from the main entrance/MLK, Jr. Blvd.
- Landscaping proposed includes shrubbery beds and street trees, including a lawn between the building and the parking lot.

## **STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH**

- The Willis-Selden Historic District was established in 2011 and is a mix of commercial structures, single-family dwellings, and multi-family apartment buildings. The district is large and threads northward along the corridor into "Midtown."
- The Cass-Davenport Historic District was also established in 2011 and is a small district of multi-family apartment buildings centered on Cass.
- The proposed building appears to be sensitively designed in a modern vocabulary and is suitable for its historic context in its use, scale, and architectural character.

## **ISSUES**

- None. The proposed development will help rebuild density in the area and connect the multi-family historic fabric of two of the city's historic districts.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### Section 21-2-5, Effects of projects on districts

The Commission is requested to make a finding concerning the “demonstrable effects of the proposed project and report same to the Mayor and City Council.” The intent of this section is to provide guidance to city government prior to committing to a particular course of action, under the following requirement:

*A City-financed, licensed, permitted, authorized or contracted physical development project shall be considered to have a demonstrable effect on a designated or proposed historic district when any condition of the project creates a change, beneficial or adverse, in the quality of the historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, social or cultural significance that qualified the property for designation as an historic district or that may qualify the property for designation as an historic district. Generally, adverse effects occur under conditions which include:*

- (1) Destruction or alteration of all or part of a resource;*
- (2) Isolation from or alteration of the surrounding environment of a resource;*
- (3) Introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the resource and its setting;*
- (4) Transfer or sale of a City-owned resource without adequate conditions or restrictions regarding preservation, maintenance, or use; and*
- (5) Neglect of a resource resulting in its deterioration or destruction.*

Staff recommends that the Commission find a demonstrable effect for the project, and that it is likely to be **beneficial**.