

STAFF REPORT 05-11-2022 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 22-7802

ADDRESS: 150 W. BOSTON BOULEVARD (AKA BENJAMIN SIEGEL HOUSE)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BOSTON-EDISON

APPLICANT: DR. DEVON HOOVER

DESIGNER/CONTRACTOR: ART HARRISON DESIGN, ALITEX LIMITED

OWNER OF RECORD: DEVON HOOVER

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 05-05-2022

SCOPE: ERECT GREENHOUSE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is 150 West Boston Boulevard, properly known as the Benjamin Siegel House. This resplendent mansion was designed by architect Albert Kahn and erected in 1915 for the wealthy owner of the B. Siegel department store in downtown Detroit.



View of 150 W. Boston, as seen from Boston Boulevard sidewalk, looking north. House to right, carriage house at left. Proposed location of new greenhouse is to immediate right (east) of carriage house, Staff photo, May 5, 2022.

The 13,000 SF mansion sits on a sprawling through-block parcel greater than two acres in size, including lawns, manicured landscape beds, shrubs, ornamental and mature shade trees. While the house faces Boston Boulevard to the south, the substantial carriage house is oriented perpendicularly, with access from Second Avenue to the west. Remnant walls for an earlier greenhouse exist to the immediate east of the carriage house. These walls are in deteriorated condition and appear to be partially grown over.



150 W. Boston outlined in yellow, per Detroit Parcel Viewer. Proposed greenhouse location shown with arrow.



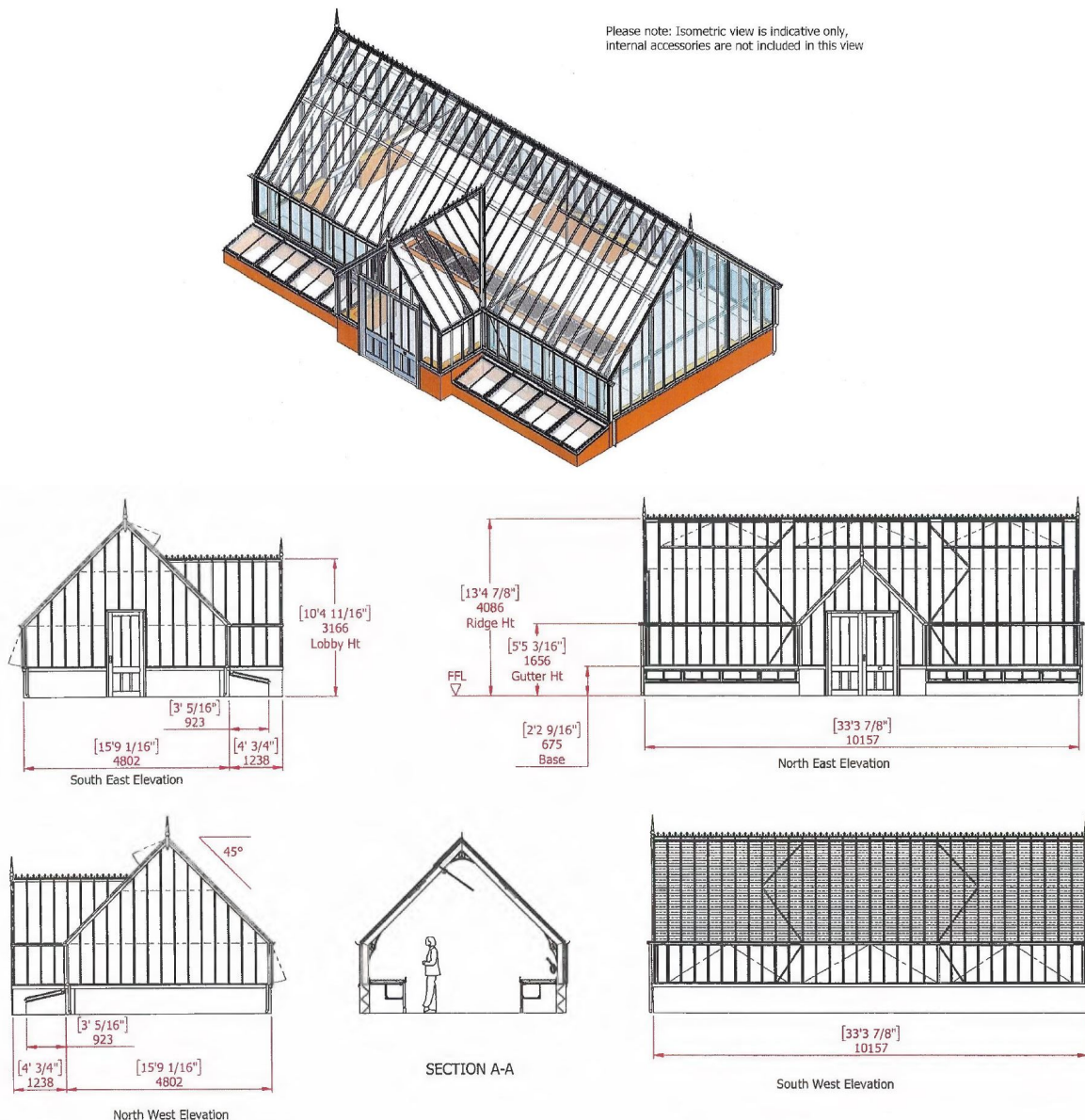
View of historic carriage house at Second Avenue (proposed greenhouse location behind). Staff photo, May 5, 2022

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Per the submitted drawings, documents, and scope of work, the applicant is proposing to **erect a greenhouse** adjacent to the existing carriage house, at the location of a former greenhouse. The size is approximately 34' by 16' with a lobby entrance extending an additional 4' to the east and an overall height of approximately 13'

The work proposed includes the following:

- Installation of new underground service lines
- Removal of existing (cast-in-place concrete) greenhouse wall and foundations
- Remove tree at corner of fence for access
- Excavation and installation of concrete slab/foundations
- Insulated brick kneewalls about 2' high, with stucco texture/color to match the carriage house, capped with bluestone
- Bluestone pavers at entry walk
- Premanufactured ornamental aluminum and glass greenhouse structure



Greenhouse elevations and rendering from applicant submission.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The greenhouse is proposed for a location immediately to the east of the carriage house that was historically occupied by a greenhouse or conservatory. It is not clear whether the former greenhouse was part of the Kahn design for the property or appeared in later decades. There is also no record available to staff concerning the previous structure's design or when it was removed, though the applicant states that a former steel and glass structure was "destroyed" over 50 years ago. Only the poured concrete knee walls remain extant, and are reportedly in a crumbling and heaving state. In any case, reproduction of the earlier design would of course not be required under the Standards and Guidelines, unless it was removed in violation.
- The proposed new aluminum and glass greenhouse covers about 2/3 of the footprint of the former, larger greenhouse, based on the locations of the remnant walls.
- Though the remnant walls have some minor historical interest, and appear to have been subsumed into the landscape in a picturesque manner over the years, staff does *not* consider them to be *a distinctive character-defining feature important to the historic character of the property*, and thus recommends that their removal to allow erection of the new structure would not be inappropriate.



Reverse (south-facing) view of 150 W Boston as seen from Glynn Court sidewalk. Remnant wall visible at center.
Staff photo, May 5, 2022

- The new structure is well-designed with quality materials, and is compatible with the site and its district context. It is designed by Alitex Greenhouses and Conservatories of Hampshire, United Kingdom. Alitex, according to the applicant, has a partnership with the British National Trust, manager of historic estates. Though the company's products are characterized as "Victorian" style greenhouses, there is no concern with anachronistic design (i.e., Standard 3) as the greenhouse will clearly read as a newly built structure, and, in staff's opinion, is a timeless greenhouse design used contemporaneously in all eras.
- A "tree at corner of fence" is proposed to be removed for access. It is not clear if a portion of the fence will also have to be temporarily opened.

ISSUES

- None. Staff recommends approval as appropriate, with minor conditions offered below.

RECOMMENDATION

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

The proposed work is compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features of its environment, does not destroy historic materials that characterize the property, and is compliant with the district's Elements of Design.

Staff therefore recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Boston-Edison Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that, at project completion:

- Any fencing temporarily removed shall be stored and returned to position; and,
- Any major landscaping impacted by the project, including the tree at corner of fence required for access, be replaced in kind.