

STAFF REPORT 08-10-2022 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 22-7954

ADDRESS: 5021 TIREMAN (AKA THE BLUE BIRD INN)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BLUE BIRD INN

APPLICANT: JONAH RADUNS-SILVERSTEIN/DETROIT SOUND CONSERVANCY

OWNER OF RECORD: DETROIT SOUND CONSERVANCY

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 07-27-2022

SCOPE: REPLACE GLASS BLOCK/WINDOWS/DOORS, INSTALL GUTTER AT REAR

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Blue Bird Inn is one of the city's newest local historic districts, designated by City Council in October 2020. It consists of a single contributing property (resource), that being the single-story commercial building shown below. The current condition in August 2022 is basically identical to that at district designation, with a façade ornamented by artwork and design elements closely associated with its time as a premier bebop club. Per the Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB) report,

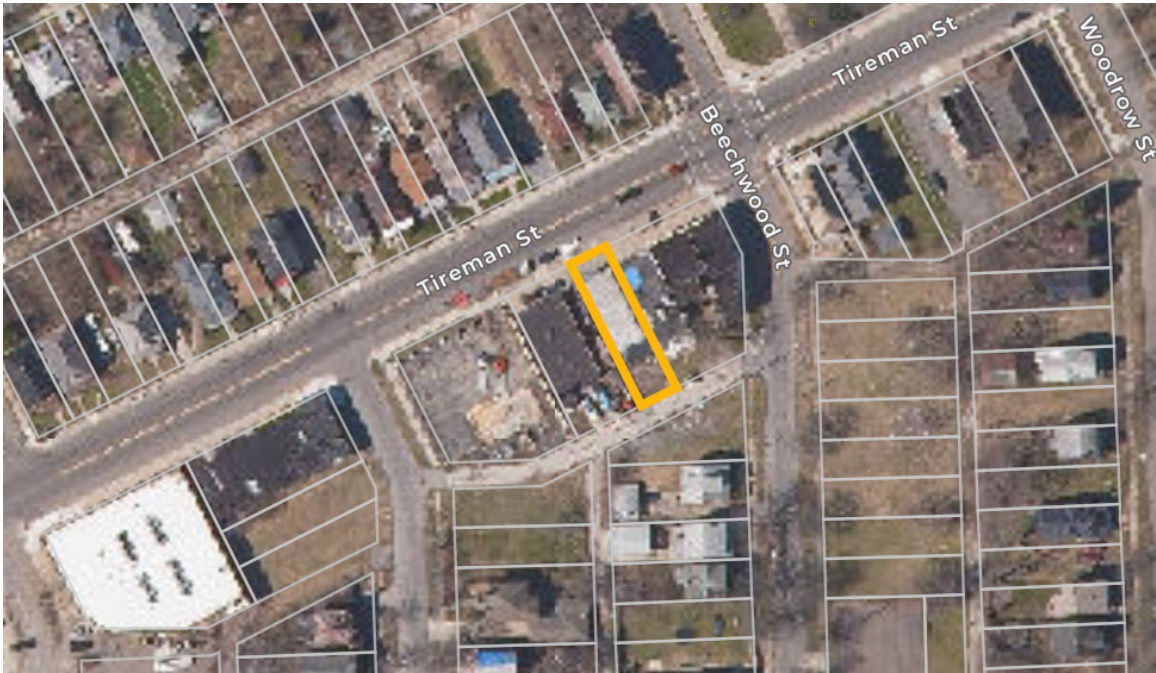
The front façade (north elevation) is symmetrical and modestly embellished with a decorative brick parapet capped with concrete and defined by a central Roman arch inlaid with a concrete medallion featuring a rosette and egg-and-dart motifs and flanked by single concrete volutes...The original entryway and storefront windows were modified by a significant 1948 exterior alteration and are now comprised of two recessed wooden doors barred by



View of 5021 Tireman, looking south. Staff photo, July 27, 2022.

a black metal security gate and flanked by two vertical column single glass-block windows and two large rectangular openings, the western opening filled with glass-block and the eastern opening covered with plywood. Both storefront openings are covered with a smooth stucco veneer painted cobalt blue and featuring decorative images of birds, musicians with various instruments, musical notes, and cocktail glasses..."

HDAB establishes a Period of Significance from 1948-1960. In the designation report, they further state that "no substantive alterations to the exterior have taken place since the 1948 front façade alteration that occurred within the period of significance."



5021 Tireman (AKA Blue Bird Inn Historic District) outlined in yellow, per Detroit Parcel Viewer.



Detail view of 5021 Tireman, at entrance. Staff photo, July 27, 2022.

PROPOSAL

Per the submitted documents, narrative, and scope of work, the applicant is proposing to:

- Remove existing glass block and plywood (boarding) at front
- Replace with new glass block and inset windows
- Remove existing metal gate on front and plywood on back
- Install commercial storefront glass door on front of building (front door)
- Install commercial push-bar metal doors at rear of building
- Install new gutter system on left side of rear of building



Detail view of 5021 Tireman, showing original and later glass block. One unit here (red arrow) is compromised with moisture. Staff photo, July 27, 2022.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Blue Bird Inn Historic District was established as significant under National Register criteria A, B, and D. These criteria, respectively, relate to an association that has made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history (A), an association with the lives of significant persons in our past (B), and a finding that the property may be likely to yield information important to history (D). The building was not designated for its architectural significance (criterion C), though the Commission must nevertheless ensure that *integrity necessary to continue to convey its historic significance* under the other criteria be preserved and maintained.
- Because of the idiosyncratic nature of this particular historic resource, the relatively small historic façade takes on substantial importance in maintaining the historic character of this building. Any alterations should be conservative and minimal. Original historic materials associated with the building's Period of Significance, because of their obvious scarcity, should be scrupulously preserved.
- The building, to the best of staff's research inquiries, actually had full glass-block windows during its period of significance. At an undetermined time in the 1970s-1980s "inset" windows (apparently aluminum) were introduced into the glass block fields. See applicant provided photo below, which is consistent with many others found from various sources. Note that one appears to be a horizontal slider (at the east), while at the west a fixed unit is apparent:



Applicant provided photo.

- Later, the center glass block was replaced and the inset window openings were removed. A careful staff examination of the glass block field revealed a lighter colored mortar glass block was re-introduced after the removal of the slider windows. In staff's opinion, the glass block that has backfilled the center of these windows (i.e., 15 individual pieces arrayed 5 long by 3 high) are therefore a replacement material and not original material from the Period of Significance, though they are an exact match of the earlier design. Staff finds it highly unlikely that the removed glass block from 1948 would have been stored on site and put back in place decades later when the earlier inset windows were removed. However, it is likely that the surrounding glass block does date to the Period of Significance and is thus original historic fabric.



Detail view of west glass block window. Note lighter mortar joints at center. Staff photo, July 27, 2022.

- The condition of the eastern window (to the left) is unknown as it is covered with board. The applicant submission implies that the window/glass block is missing, but staff has not been able to confirm.
- As a specialized type of masonry, glass block should be able to be repointed and if necessary, reinstalled in the original openings. This would not be common, but this is an uncommonly important installation.

ISSUES

- Staff generally supports the application, but recommends that
 - glass block units likely present during the 1948-1960 period of significance be retained in their original position unless the unit has been compromised (broken or admitting moisture). The original units appears to be the outer two perimeter rows at the western, and possibly the boarded eastern window.
 - the proposed vinyl slider inset windows within the glass block fields instead be specified as an aluminum unit, appropriate to this property's expression and historical period. The use of vinyl will create an unnecessarily jarring and contemporary juxtaposition with the balance of the façade, detracting from the overall character and eroding the property's historic integrity.
- Staff does not find the operation of these windows (i.e., sliding or fixed) to be relevant to their overall appropriateness, only the material.
- No other issues with the remaining scope, including the proposed front door. The front door should match the finish of the new inset windows

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, and does not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. 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 Elements of Design for the Blue Bird Inn Historic District, with the conditions that

- the proposed windows be specified as a aluminum, steel, or other finish material contemporary with a mid-century commercial building, and corresponding to the door, as confirmed by staff, and;
- the outermost two rows of glass block at the perimeter of the eastern window be preserved, and that the new window described above be set within this existing historic fabric, and;
- replacement glass block, as needed at the eastern window, be of an exact matching design to the preserved block at the western window. Some or all of the removed block at the center of the western window may be repurposed at the east.