

STAFF REPORT 09-13-2023 MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: 23-8515

ADDRESS: 300 MADISON

HISTORIC DISTRICT: MADISON-HARMONIE HISTORIC DISTRICT

APPLICANT: JOHN P. BIGGAR/STUDIOZONE, LLC

ARCHITECT: TOD WILLIAMS BILLIE TSIEN ARCHITECTS LLP

OWNER: MUSIC HALL CENTER FOR THE PE ET AL

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 08-21-2023

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 09-01-2023

SCOPE: ERECT BUILDING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The project site is across an alley immediately adjacent to the historic Music Hall building. Currently the parcel is a parking lot that has been enhanced over the course of the pandemic with temporary stages and installations hosting outdoor performance events.



View of the Music Hall (350 Madison), looking towards the south. Development site for the new building/addition is visible at the right in this image, across an intervening alley. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.

The Music Hall at 350 Madison, originally the Wilson Theater, is a contributing historic resource designed by architect William Kapp of Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls and erected in 1928. Over the decades, the building has variously hosted legitimate theatre, the Michigan Opera Theatre, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, touring Broadway productions, the Acting Company, the Shaw Festival, the Young Vic, dozens of musical and performance productions, and even a stint as Detroit's Cinerama. Per the HDAB (Historic Designation Advisory Board) report, the building is "significant as one of the best examples of early Art Deco architecture in Detroit," and the building's "architectural sculpture was designed and executed by Corrado Parducci...his sculpture always comprised an integral part of the design of the building it adorned and never had the 'applied' feeling which led many contemporary critics to scorn architectural ornament." HDAB describes the exterior as:

The front (north) elevation has a dark marble base topped by beige Mankato stone to the height of the

marquee. Above the marquee are six xtone pilasters alternately surmounted by the masks of tragedy and comedy. These pilasters form a fenestration pattern which is composed of paired openings divided by slender engaged columns. The cornice line above the pilasters is covered by a green and tan mosaic. On either side of the pilasters is one bay of face brick which wraps around the corners of the building. The east elevation features Mankato stone with face brick courses, topped by face brick, with some decorative brickwork at the cornice line. The other two facades are common brick. This exterior, a 1928 version of the modern, combines features of the Arts and Crafts style with early Art Deco.

The existing parking lot to the west of the building, subject of this application, has received the following approvals for work in recent years:

21-7487: Full outdoor stage and media equipment, astroturfing and mesh liner surface, container bar, moveable seating, artificial shrubs and light posts, large banners, fence mesh, artificial vines. Issued 9/5/2021

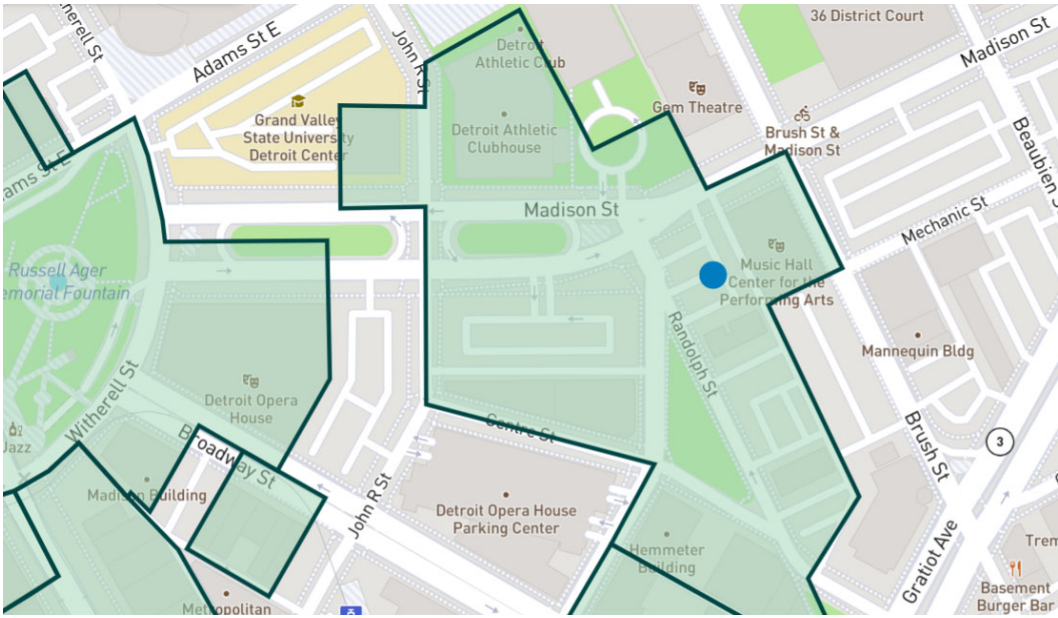
21-7136: Replace existing black aluminum fence with new black aluminum fence, resurface lot, configuration to remain the same. Issued 2/25/2021



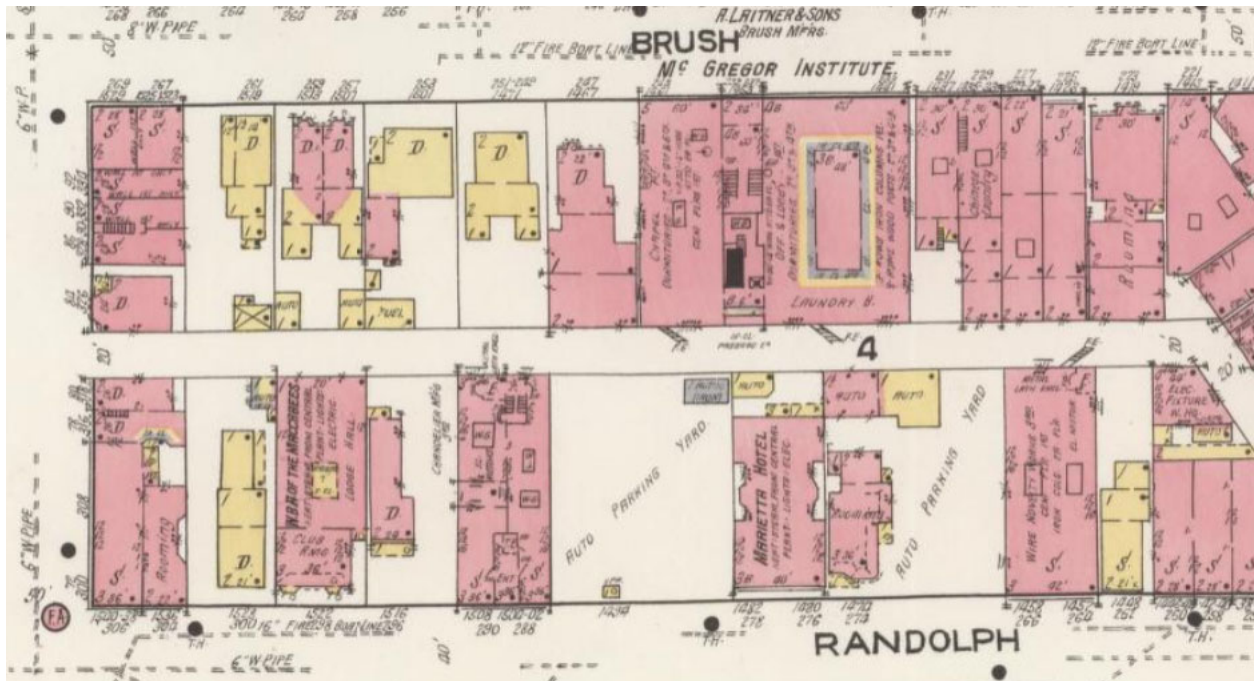
View of existing conditions at 300 Madison, looking towards the south. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.



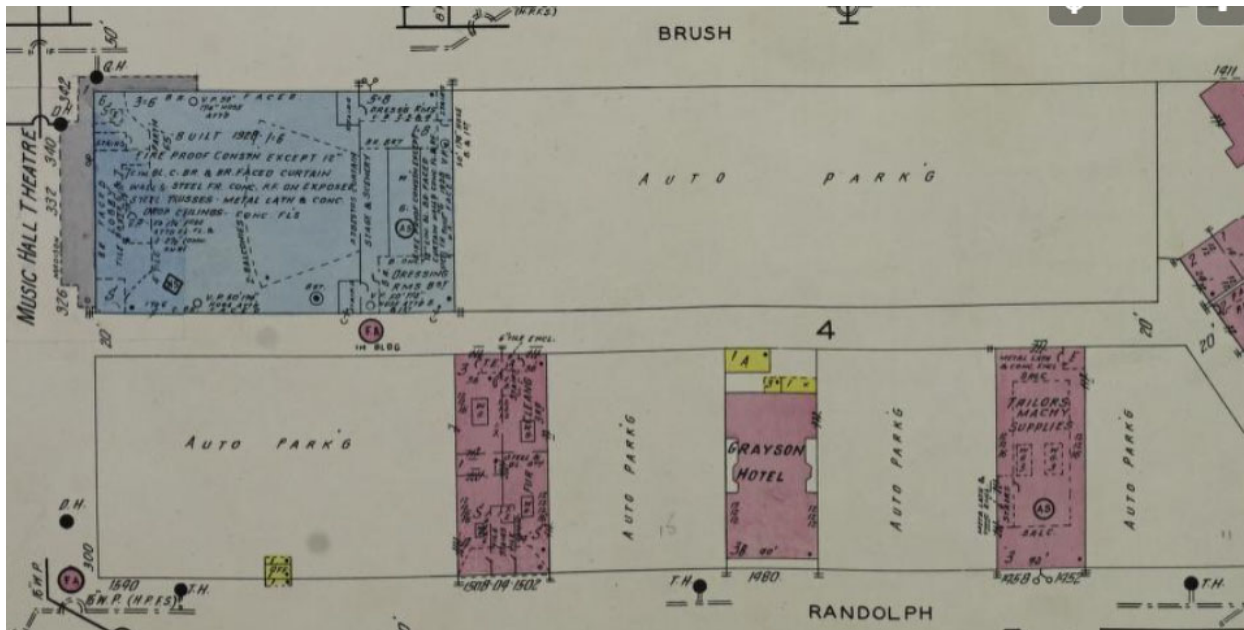
Detroit parcel viewer, 300 Madison outlined in yellow.



Project site indicated with blue dot, extents of the Madison-Harmonie Historic District in green. Other districts are visible.



1921 Sanborn map of block bound by Madison (to left, or north), Brush, and Randolph..



1950 Sanborn map of same block, showing addition of Music Hall in 1928, and substantial later demolition to create parking lots. Subject development site is at lower left in this image, and appears to have been a parking lot for at least 75 years.



View of parcel from Randolph, looking east. Music Hall building in background. Staff photo, September 11, 2023.



View of the historic Music Hall Building. Staff photo, September 1, 2023.



View of 1502 Randolph, looking east, which is adjacent and south of the development parcel. Staff photo, September 11, 2023.



View towards the west of historic context across Randolph from the development parcel. This is the site of the Madison and Lenox Buildings demolished in 2005, now a lightly used parking lot. Staff photo, September 11, 2023.



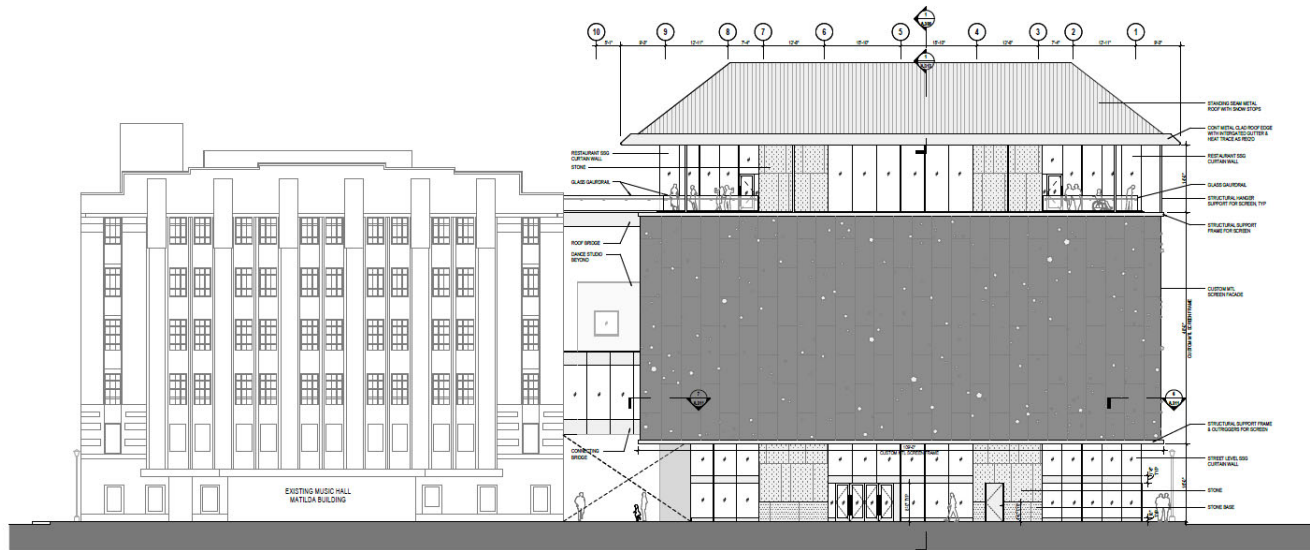
View of the vacated Randolph Street right-of-way to the north, and site of the Roy Court Apartments, now a traffic drive for the DAC Parking Garage. Staff photo, September 11, 2023.



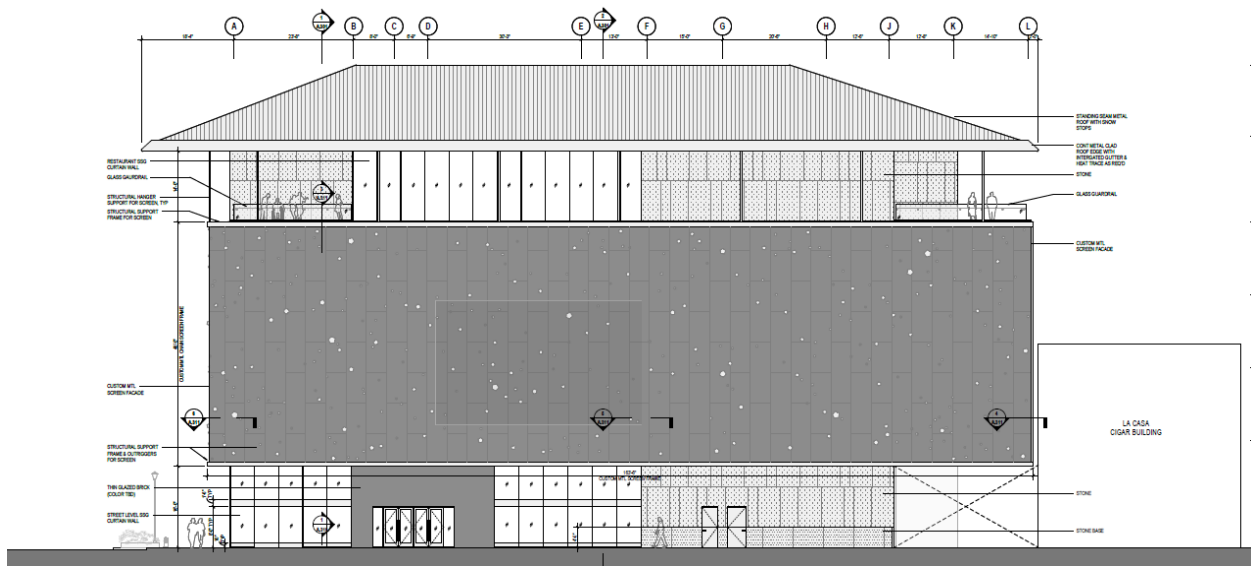
Wide view of context, looking east. Music Hall at approximate center. Staff photo, September 11, 2023.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

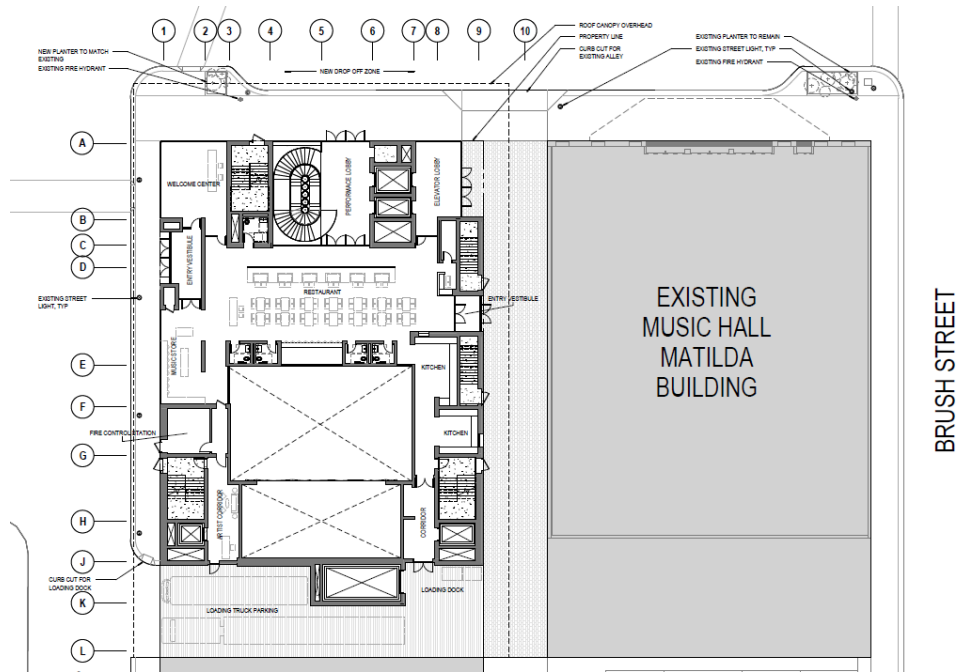
Per the submitted drawings and narrative, the applicant is proposing to erect a large, 5-story “performance center beacon” building of more than 100,000 SF to serve as an expansive addition to the historic Music Hall building across an alley to the east. The new building is proposed to be divided into three main sections; a base with glass curtain wall and granite panels, a middle section of three-stories that is veiled by a bespoke brise-soleil aluminum screen (artist/design not yet selected), and a top story incorporating more glass curtain walls and terraces underneath a cantilevered roof.



1 BUILDING ELEVATION - NORTH - SCREEN
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



Madison (top) and Randolph (bottom) Elevations, per submitted materials.



Site/1st Floor Plan (top) and perspective rendering (bottom), per submitted materials.

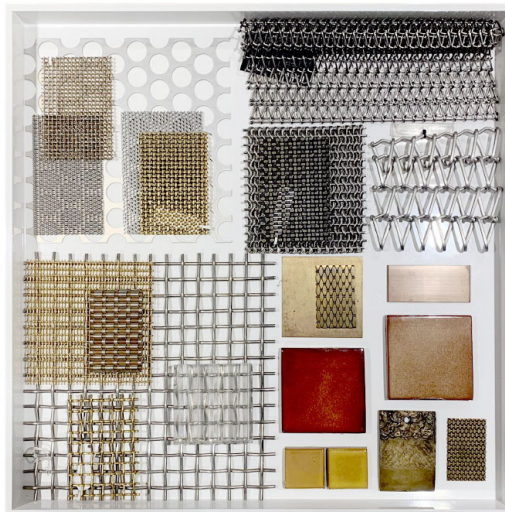
STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Madison-Harmonie Historic District was established in 1988.
- In recent years, the subject parcel has been activated with a number of temporary installations, stage, and signage to accommodate outdoor and other temporary events.
- The project represents a substantial addition at the heart of a relatively small downtown historic district that has previously suffered from controversial demolitions, most notoriously that of the Madison-Lenox Hotel in 2005. Earlier, the Roy Court apartment building and the Detroit Athletic Club's Albert Kahn designed garage was demolished to the north of the site (and Randolph Street vacated north of Madison), to allow the new DAC parking garage and its service drives to be built. In the late 1990s, corresponding with the construction of new baseball/football stadiums, the Gem Theatre and Century Club were relocated across Madison from the Music Hall, just steps outside of the historic district boundary.
- Sensitively designed new construction can provide necessary and important density and street activation to sustain nearby historic buildings, and districts overall. In this particular instance, the applicant's proposal represents a rare opportunity to add a monumental building anchoring this important downtown intersection, thereby beginning to mitigate against the suburban-style parking lots and driveways now debasing the immediate vicinity.
- When considering new infill construction for historic districts, the Elements of Design (codified in 1988 upon the district's designation) represent a starting point for identification of historic character and architectural/landscape features that are important to the physical expression of the overall district, and may guide the Commission in their assessment of appropriateness for new proposals. The full Elements of Design for the district is given as Section 21-2-151 of the Detroit City Code. Staff finds that the Elements of Design offers the following (excerpted) relevant points, which are followed by staff's assessment concerning conformance:

- ***Element 1, Height:*** *Buildings in the district range from three stories tall to nine stories tall... Taller buildings are located in the northern half of the district, primarily around Madison and the E. Grand River/North Center Area.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Height of five stories plus roof level is within range and compatible with the immediate context (i.e., the historic Music Hall building) and the expectation for taller buildings around Madison.
- ***Element 2, Proportion of buildings' front facades:*** *Proportion varies in the district, depending on the style and size and height of the buildings. ...However, when buildings are on corner lots, their secondary façades may be wider than tall.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Proportion of front/secondary facades are satisfactory.
- ***Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:*** *Areas of solids to voids vary greatly from building to building, depending on style, size, and function of the structure. ... The monumentally scaled buildings on Madison have very large window openings as well. The areas of voids ranges from approximately 15 percent to 80 percent; most fall into the 35 percent to 50 percent range.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The building, of a monumental and bold contemporary style, has solids and voids that add variety and interest (discussed further below) and fall in a range appropriate for the style.
- ***Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:*** *Openings within the façades are generally regularly arranged, due to the classical stylistic derivation of most of the buildings. Many different types of windows exist within individual buildings and throughout the district; bay windows, arched openings, and double-hung sashes are some of the types.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** With the exception of the cantilevered dance studio over the alley, the building does not feature traditional punched window openings, but instead features glassy street and restaurant (top) levels, which juxtapose in a modern style with the prominent screen at the building's middle. The position of the screen, enclosing interior performance spaces,

speaks directly to the building's purpose and function.

- **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets:** *All buildings in the district are situated on their front lot lines and many abut the neighboring buildings. When this occurs, a continuous flow of wall occurs.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The building fully occupies the development parcel, and extends across the alley in two places to connect with the Music Hall building (through a non-character-defining side elevation of that building). A continuous street wall is firmly re-established by the proposal.
- **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections:** *The entrances of the buildings fronting on Madison are centrally located on their front façades and are entered on axis. The steps project outward from the façades while the entrance openings recede... The Music Hall Lobby is entered through openings that are flush with the front façade.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Like its historic neighbor, the proposed building is entered through openings that are flush with the Madison façade. At Randolph, the opening is slightly recessed amidst a glazed thin brick portal.
- **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** *Brick predominates as a building material of the majority of buildings in the district. Bedford limestone is the major material of the Detroit Athletic Club Mosaic, marble, mankato stone and brick are combined on the façade of the Music Hall. Foundations, keystones, window sills and decorative trim of brick buildings are frequently stone or cast stone. Glazed tile, terra cotta and enameled brick are also found in the district. Window frames are either metal or wood...*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal incorporates a range of modern and traditional materials which enter into a moderately complex relationship across the building's façade. These include granite, glazed brick, glass, metal panels, and the aluminum brise soleil screening. The screen, per the submitted materials palette (reproduced below) has the potential to expand the materials palette further, based on the ultimate artistic vision selected.



Preliminary Material Palette for Screen & Ornamental Jewel Attachments

- **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** *The most common textural relationship is that of the low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick juxtaposed with smooth masonry trim. Basements of larger buildings are frequently rusticated stone; the D.A.C. walls are of smooth stone. Enameled brick and terra cotta are smooth in texture; mankato stone has its own textural interest. Brick details and carved stone are commonly used to provide textural interest on many buildings. In general, the district is rich in textural relationships.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The various materials employed in the design have distinctly different

textures but are generally smooth. Substantial texture will be offered by the bespoke aluminum brise soleil at the 2nd through 4th floors at Madison and Randolph. Though undetermined, the color, form, and character of this screen is intended to symbolize the rich and vibrant musical history of Detroit. Staff believes that it is important that the texture created by the ultimate “form and character” of this screen be robust and pronounced, juxtaposing with the smoother areas of the building.

- **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** *The buildings facing Harmonie Park are predominately red or brown brick. White enameled brick, colored tiles, green and tan mosaics, buff-colored brick, tan mankato stone, and light gray masonry also exist in the district. Window frames on Madison are usually painted green; the window frames of the Roy Court Apartments are cream colored to match the buff brick. Green, gray, black, and brown are common colors for window frames elsewhere in the district.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Though not all finish colors are indicated in the elevation drawings, the rendering captures a range of tones and colors (including blacks, browns, and metallic tones) that appear to be in a conforming range. The treatment of the brise soleil screen, as in Element 7 and 8 above, will be paramount in the final expression of the building with respect to texture, color, and other visual qualities.
- **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** *Architectural details generally relate to architectural styles. ... The Music Hall has early Art Deco detail; its vertical sign is centered on the front of the rooftop and a marquee rests above the entrances. Where buildings are situated on corner lots, their secondary façades are often articulated and detailed in ways similar to their front façade.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Detailing on this contemporary building is handled in an appropriately contemporary manner. The secondary but longer façade along Randolph is designed and detailed similarly to the front façade.
- **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** *Few of the roofs in the district can be seen from the street with the exception of the tiled front slope of the building at 1502 Randolph and the very shallow sloped roof of the Harmonie Club which is visible from longer distances.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal calls for a “pitched metal standing-seam roof” which cantilevers over corner and rear rooftop terraces. The cantilevered roof over top level terraces is a common expression in contemporary design. The pitched roof above the cantilever appears very prominent in the elevation drawings, though the perspective rendering provided appears to minimize its visibility (staff is doubtful that the roof has been rendered as depicted in the elevations). Nevertheless, the pitched roof is certain to be seen from more distant vantage points. The tiled, sloped front roof of 1502 Randolph mentioned in this Element is directly adjacent to the building (see photo on earlier page). Due to the height and bulk of the building, the pitched roof may not be particularly visible from the street nearby. However, the design may be stronger if the pitched roof is minimized, redesigned, or eliminated. Staff assesses that this Element has not been met.
- **Element 12, Walls of continuity:** *The major wall of continuity is created by the façades of the buildings themselves. Uniform setbacks within blocks exist throughout the district. Where buildings abut, a continuous wall exists. Where rows of trees are planted in front of buildings, a secondary wall of continuity is created.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal clearly established and restores walls of continuity.
- **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** *The major significant landscape features in the district are the island on Madison between John R and Randolph and the triangular Harmonie Park, bounded by Randolph, East Grand River and Center Streets...*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Significant landscape features are neither affected nor created by the

proposal, which is acceptable for a zero lot line building in a dense urban setting.

- **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures:** *Most vacant land in the district is comprised of parking lot usage...Madison has a more open feeling due primarily to the width of the street and the space between buildings.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal infills a prominently vacant city parcel, properly establishing much-needed structural bulk in juxtaposition to an excess of open space existing in the district.

- **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** *The scale of buildings on Madison is monumental. Elements within range from medium to large, with detail of a small to medium scale...*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The building, and its façade elements, is appropriately monumental.

- **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevations** *[no relevant excerpts]*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The building's directional expression, when twinned with the existing historic Music Hall, is apparent and readable.

- **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** *A consistency to the building setbacks is created due to the siting of all buildings on the front building lines throughout the district.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal is sited on the front building lines, like all other buildings in the district.

- **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** *Most buildings occupy their entire lot, with the exception of the Detroit Athletic Club and the Butzel Memorial Building, which both have narrow side yards.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposed building occupies its entire parcel, with the reasonable exception of the required loading and service area to the south (at the street level only). The structure of the building completely fills in the streetwall from the Randolph alley at Madison, then west and south to the north wall of 1502 Randolph.

- **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** *The degree of complexity ranges from very simple to moderately complex. While there is sometimes diversity within individual façades from story to story, all buildings are straightforward in their arrangement of architectural elements and details.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** Staff assesses the proposal's facades as only moderately complex, and thus in conformance with this Element. Though different materials and expressions are used in combination (as discussed above), the overall expression is straightforward, and does not exhibit a high level of complexity or idiosyncrasy which might be found necessary in other historic districts (e.g., Brush Park). As mentioned previously, the final design of the brise soleil screen will have some impact on this expression. Staff believes there is potential for this artwork to be integrated into the building's architecture in a manner analogous to the Parducci sculpture work in the historic Music Hall; an "architectural sculpture."

- **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** *Buildings are generally oriented towards the streets they face. The Madison Hotel Building has equally important façades facing Madison and Harmonie Park. Some buildings on corner lots have secondary entrances oriented towards the side streets. Interesting vistas are created by the irregular street plan.*
- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposed building, via its entrances, curtain wall systems, terraces, and especially the brise soleil screen element, is determinedly oriented towards both Madison and Randolph.

- **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** *Most buildings are symmetrical in appearance.*

- **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal is, within the bounds of its modern contemporary styling, a serene and symmetrical composition.
 - **Element 22, General environmental character:** *The Madison-Harmonie Historic District has an urban mixed-use character due to the organizational, entertainment, and multi-unit residential buildings on Madison and the dense and enclosed nature of the mostly commercial Harmonie Park area. Two major public spaces, the island in the center of Madison and the triangular Harmonie Park bounded by Center, Randolph, and East Grand River, define the area and contribute substantially to its character; Madison is a grand thoroughfare while Harmonie Park is an isolated pocket off major thoroughfares. Signage, primarily the Music Hall and Madison-Lenox signs, identify significant buildings and act as beacons to the area. A cohesiveness is achieved through the use of unified landscaping and uniform setbacks. Where building demolition has occurred, primarily on the east side of Randolph between Gratiot and Madison, the area is less cohesive.*
 - **HDC Staff Assessment:** The proposal is a monumentally scaled, grand contemporary building positioned on the “grand thoroughfare” of Madison. The building, in the application materials, is described as a “performance center beacon.” Staff assesses that the building, as suggested in this Element, is compliant in that it has strong potential as a modern landmark and a contemporary beacon “to the area,” much like its historic predecessor to the east was, and still is today.
- In reviewing both the historic context, and specifically the Elements of Design excerpted above, staff is satisfied that the proposal is appropriate, as high lot coverages, densities, institutional uses, monumentally expressive buildings, and zero lot line development are clearly part of this district’s historic character. Additionally, the various architectural details, materials, colors, and textures are appropriate.
 - As the Commission knows, professional staff will generally recommend approval of applications unless, in our opinion, the proposal is “demonstrably inappropriate.” This means that specific reasons can be identified that the proposed work is out of character with its historic context, or negatively affects elements exhibiting distinct historic character related to a property’s historic significance, or that several (typically not just one) of the Elements of Design are definitively failed. Per the ordinance (Section 21-2-78 (3)), the Commission may only issue a Denial if “the proposed work will be inappropriate”; additionally, specific reasons need to be provided for such a finding, to allow for changes to be made and resubmitted. An application should not be rejected if it is “less” appropriate than other options, or does not represent the “best” design. The standard for Denial is “inappropriate.” Other regulatory review bodies, (e.g., PDD Design Review, Board of Zoning Appeals) have different guidelines and standards supported by other laws and ordinances. HDC staff cannot speak for them.

ISSUES

- It is staff’s opinion that the proposed new construction retains the historic character of the property and district, is aligned with the district’s Elements of Design, and protects and preserves the integrity of the property and the surrounding district.
- However, staff does recommend that the pitching and extent of the standing-seam metal roof above the cantilever be reconsidered to the extent feasible.
- A final issue is the ultimate treatment of the brise soleil screen, which is represented as a place-holder in the drawings/renderings. Because the design of this substantial element is currently undetermined, a wide range of textural and expressive outcomes may be possible. Staff recommends that the Commission may ask for this element of the building to be returned for final approval when a design is commissioned and developed. Alternately, with certain conditions or parameters discussed with the architect during this evening’s review, and established by the Commission, staff can be given authority to approve the final design.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff recommends that the proposal should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Madison-Harmonie Historic District's Elements of Design.