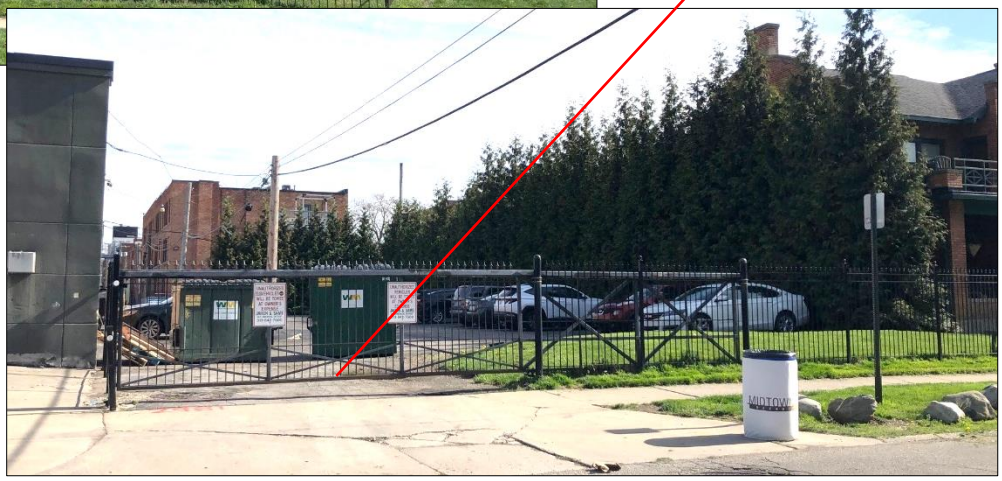
STAFF REPORT: MAY 8, 2024 MEETING **PREPARED BY**: A. DYE
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00181
ADDRESS: 441 W. WILLIS
HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN LOCAL
APPLICANT: ROBERT SLATTERY, 441 W WILLIS LLC
PROPERTY OWNER: ROBERT SLATTERY
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: APRIL 15, 2024
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: APRIL 19, 2024

SCOPE: ERECT MULTI-FAMILY BUILDING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The parcel at 441 W. Willis is currently a paved, gated surface parking lot. A vacated alley falls within the property lines.



Above: Looking southeast from Willis.
Right: Looking southwest from Willis.
Staff photos, April 19, 2024.

Top Right: Detroit Parcel Viewer.
Arrow points to vacated alley.

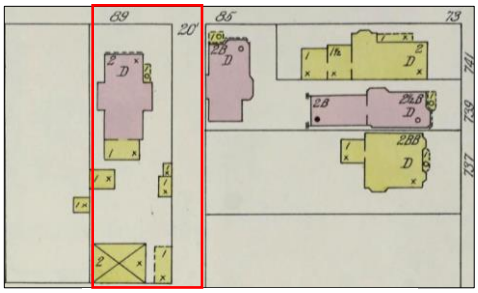
PROPOSAL

- Erect a four-unit multiple-family structure.
- Add a twelve-car surface parking lot.
- Erect a dumpster enclosure.

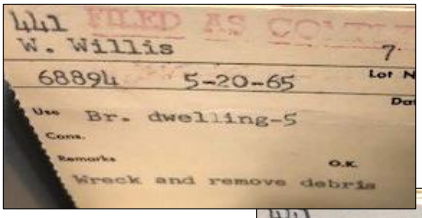
STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

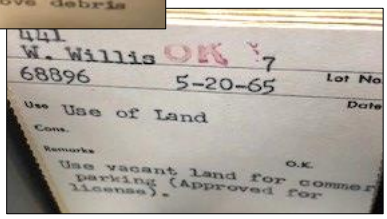
- The Willis-Selden Historic Local District was enacted on October 11, 2011.

- The 1897 Sanborn map shows a residence and a number of out-buildings on this parcel.
- While dramatic changes to W. Willis between Cass and Second are documented on the 1897 and 1921 Sanborn maps, little changed for this property (original address 89 W. Willis) between 1921 and 1950. However, the property went through a number of conversions in the 1940s and 1950s to smaller and increasing number of apartments and single rooms, culminating in the dwelling's demolition in 1965 and change of use for commercial parking.



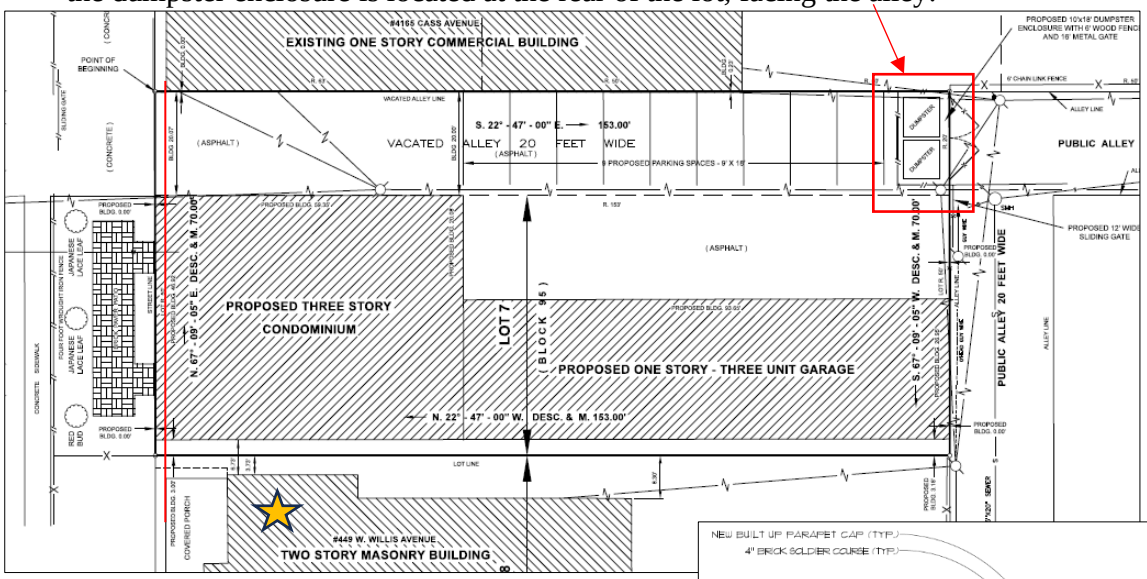
1897 Sanborn map, Vol. 2

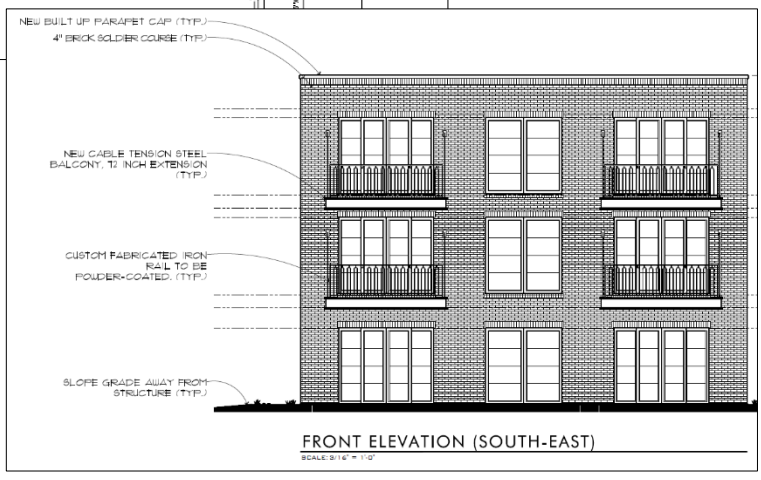




Building permit cards, BSEED.

- At the March 11, 2020 meeting, the Commission reviewed and issued a COA for a new construction application for the below three-story building and surface parking lot. Things to note in this application: the location/setback of 449 W. Willis (★) is drawn correctly (denoted by the vertical red line - the front edge of the porch is almost in line with the front wall of the proposed structure at 441 W. Willis) and the dumpster enclosure is located at the rear of the lot, facing the alley.



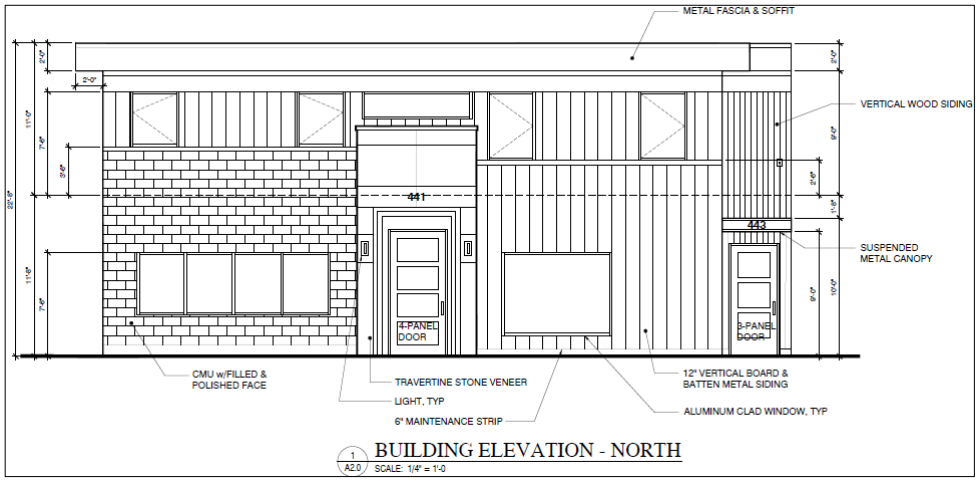


- The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, as they relate to new construction in a historic district, state a new development should be a product of its time and not directly copy the fenestration and articulation of details of historic structures while also being compatible with the contributing buildings of the district. Ways to meet the compatibility standard is through massing, size, scale, materiality, and rhythm of architectural features.
- Staff reviewed the project against the district's Element of Design to determine its compatibility with the district. The elements highlighted in bold are discussed in this staff report.

1) Height
2) Proportions of buildings' front facades
3)Proportion of openings within the façades
4) Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades
5) Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets
6) Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections
7) Relationship of materials
8) Relationship of textures
9) Relationship of colors
10) Relationship of architectural details
11) Relationship of roof shapes
12) Walls of continuity
13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments
14) Relationship of open space to structures
15) Scale of façades and façade elements
16) Directional expression of front elevations
17) Rhythm of building setbacks
18) Relationship of lot coverages
19) Degree of complexity within the facades
20) Orientation, vistas, overviews
21) Symmetric or asymmetric appearance
22) General environmental character

Element 4 - Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades. *Despite a variety of building types, the overall impression is one of regular, repetitive openings arranged horizontally within façades.*

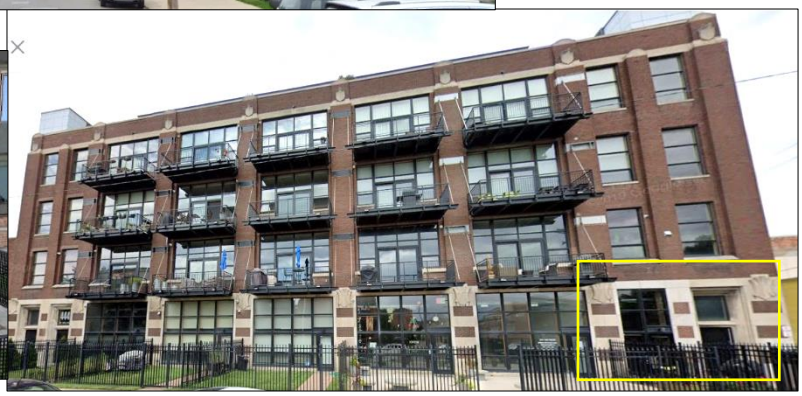
The proposed building has asymmetrically placed window and door openings, coupled with different sized windows and sill heights. The use of vertical and horizontal wall materials separated by different transition heights doesn't create a vertically or horizontally arranged façade.



Element 6 – Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections- *<u>Porches on smaller residential buildings typically project while those on other types of buildings usually do not</u>. On residential buildings only, entrances are often located several steps above grade to accommodate high basements. Doorways on smaller residential buildings are often set beneath gable-roofed or arched openings, while doorways on other buildings are typically centered on their façades.*

It is staff's opinion that the front entrance design merges the shape, massing, and materiality of the industrial building across the street to the north, and the recessed entry doors of the apartment buildings on the south side of Willis.

441 W. Willis, Google street view.



Applicant rendering. Google street view photos.

The tall, narrow, rectangular limestone entrance at 441 W. Willis mimics the proportions of the stone cladding that frames the first floor window and door openings of the industrial building to the north.

469 W. Willis *Staff photos, April 19, 2024.* *479 W. Willis*

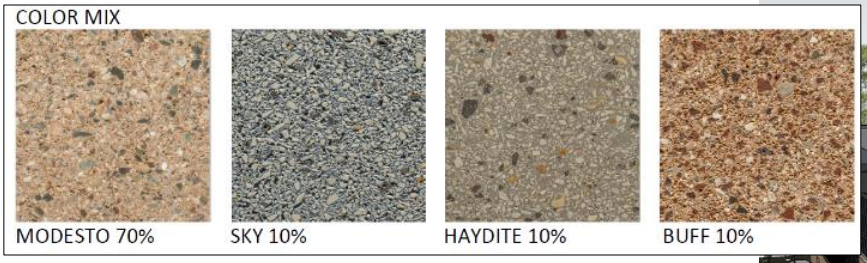
The recessed entry door at 441 W. Willis mimics the recessed entry doors of the apartment buildings that are a few lots down the street.

Element 7 - Relationship of materials. *A majority of buildings are faced with brick and feature stone or cast stone trim. Sash windows are historically wood but, in many cases, have been replaced with windows of modern materials. Stone is used for window sills on a majority of buildings within the district. While roofs within the district are generally flat and not visible, pitched roofs typically feature visible slate or asphalt shingles.*

There is a vast difference in usage of materials and colors for the proposed structure.

New Building	Historic Buildings
Eight materials, with different surface finishes and colors are proposed for the front façade.*	*Typically three-four materials are used on the fronts of the historic buildings.*
The materials offer matte and sheen finishes.	*Most of the materials offer a matte finish.*
-CMU (the four colors are distinctly different and do not read as a unified element – see Brick)	*- Brick (most variegated brick walls are similar in color/tone, reading as a single, mottled color)*
-Travertine	*- Stone (stone or cast stone)*
-Wood entry doors	*- Wood or metal entry doors*
-Aluminum-clad wood windows	*- Wood or aluminum-clad wood windows*
-Metal siding	
-Composite wood siding	
-Metal fascia and soffit	
-Six-inch tall maintenance strip. This element is at-grade and will be minimally visible. It is called out here because the material and color are not specified.	

Streetscape view, looking west on W. Willis. Subject property is denoted by the metal fence at bottom left (★). There are two dominant wall materials for each building: brick and stone.



Above: Selected colors of CMU blocks copied from applicant documents. Staff agrees the colors fall within the district's dominate colors.

Staff's concern is how the multiple cladding materials relate to the district as well as to each other. In contrast to the above streetscape photo, which shows two dominate materials and colors per building, the subject property has five wall materials and eight colors.

Element 8 - Relationship of textures. *On a majority of buildings within the district, the major textural effect is that of brick with mortar joints juxtaposed with cast stone or limestone trim. Patterned brickwork is used to create subtle detail on commercial and apartment buildings, such as spandrels and rectangular panels, and more pronounced textural interest where it exists on the upper stories of buildings….Rough-cut stone with thick mortar joints creates considerable textural interest on buildings where it exists, while other buildings feature smooth stone with thin mortar joints. In general, asphalt-shingle roofs do not contribute to textural interest.*

Out of the five materials selected for the walls, staff identified two for discussion by Commission.

Trendstone Plus – architectural CMU – which, according to the company's website, is an integrated color product that's polished to a smooth terrazzo-like finish. It appears the company offers different dimensions of blocks, which may offer a more compatible pattern to a district that has brick as its dominant cladding material. The below example shows the surface pattern of the product. Staff is interested to see the level of sheen that accompanies the "terrazzo-like" finish to the "Trendstone Plus" product, as well as a full-size CMU unit.

Staff also believes the mortar joint should be specified and detailed within the drawings. A recessed joint might help relieve the monolithic appearance that staff believes is typical of many CMU block walls.

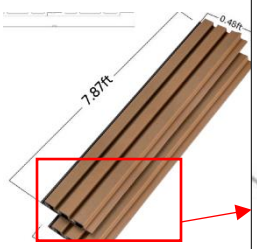
Wood Tech exterior wall panels - a composite product made of wood fibers and thermoplastics.
Staff is concerned about the visual appearance of the "wood-like" wall panels as well as the sheen that typically comes with a composite product that includes plastic.

Left: Photo from Echelon Masonry's Facebook page.

Rows of Trendstone Plus units are identified with blue stars. This example shows the product in a different size; illustrating staff's comment about the availability of sizes that are more compatible with the district's dominant use of brick.

Right: Photo from www.woodtechpanels.com website.

Staff asked the applicant to bring samples of the CMU blocks and each wall panel (Wood Tech and Pac Clad) to the meeting so the Commission can view together the materiality, surface finish and colors.



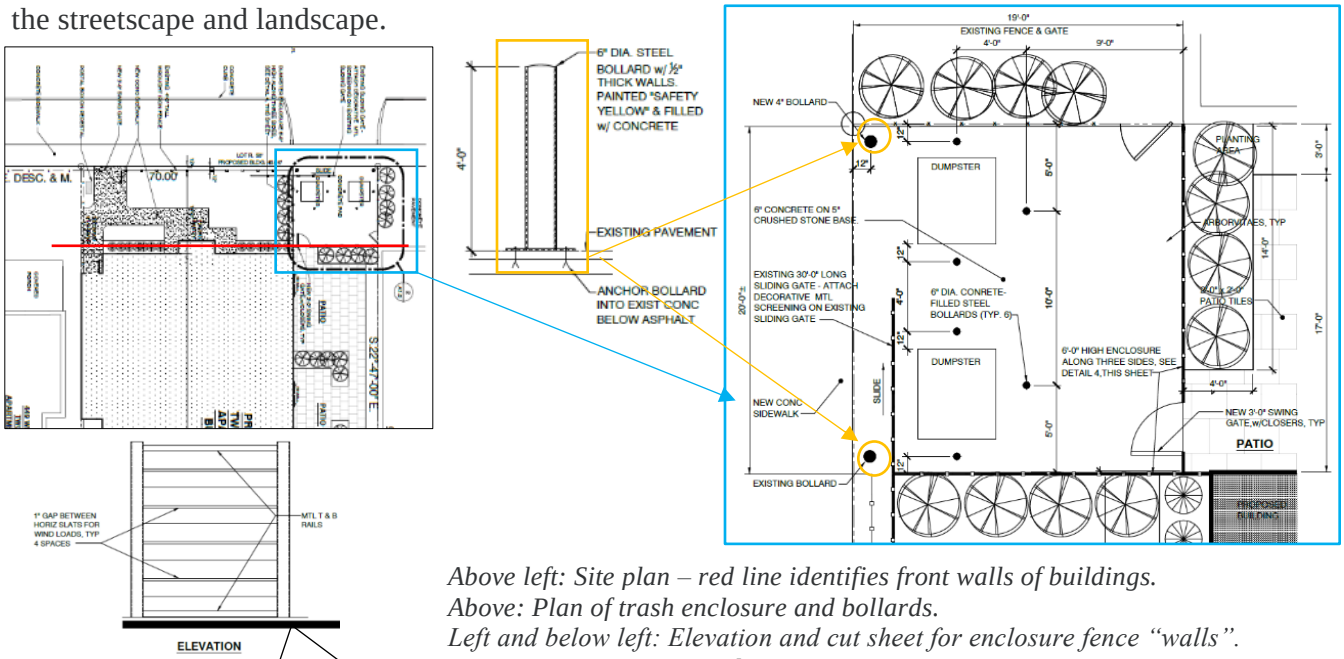
Element 12 - Walls of continuity. *Fencing, often modern steel units that resemble historic cast or wrought iron fencing, exists at the front lot line of many properties, and suggests an additional wall of continuity.*

The proposal doesn't mention a new front yard perimeter fence. A photo of the existing fence was submitted; however, the rendering shows a more opaque fence and gate in place. The applicant needs to clarify what is intended for the front yard.

Element 13 - Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. *The overall impression is that east-west streetscapes are abundantly planted whereas north-south streetscapes are not. Typical treatment of individual residential properties is a shallow, flat front lawn in grass turf, subdivided by a straight concrete walk leading to the front entrance.*

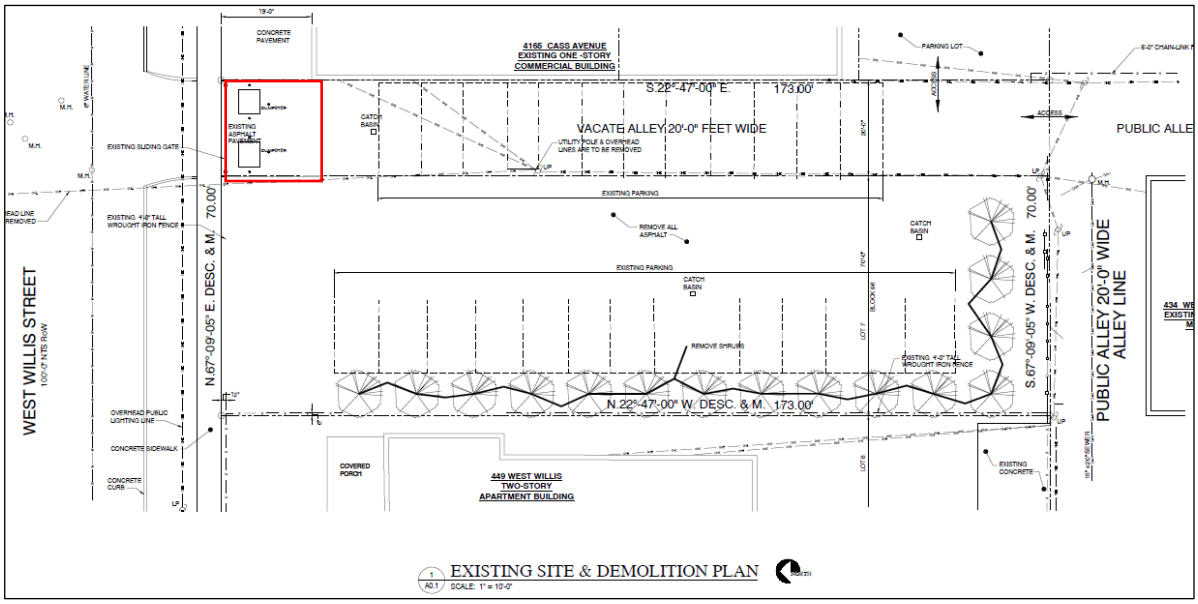
The part of the project that relates to where the structure is sited and enclosed by a transparent metal fence meets Elements 12 and 13. However, when looking at the complete application, which includes the design and placement of the trash enclosure, it is staff's opinion the project does not meet these two standards.

The site plan shows the front of the new building in line with the commercial building to the east, but conversely, the trash enclosure sits forward of both buildings. It is located in the front yard space of 441 W. Willis and is enclosed with a fence constructed of solid, plastic panels. The shine and flatness of the manufactured material does not adequately match the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood or metal, the most common materials used in fencing and is incompatible for use in the historic district (and is in conflict with *Element 7 – Relationship of Materials* and *Element 8 – Relationship of Textures*). The placement of this enclosure is incongruous to this district and destroys the site line of the streetscape and landscape.



Above left: Site plan – red line identifies front walls of buildings.
Above: Plan of trash enclosure and bollards.
Left and below left: Elevation and cut sheet for enclosure fence "walls".
Bottom center: Fence rendering
Bottom right: Applicant rendering showing trash enclosure and front yard fencing.
Staff added orange circles to denote location of bollards, based on the site plan.

The reason for the trash enclosure being proposed in the front yard is due to the entire rear yard being used for surface parking, and the remaining side yard (the former alley) being dedicated to outdoor space for building residents. Note: While the existing site plan identifies the trash bins being in the front yard now, Google street views shows the bins being located mid-block through October 2020. Staff's site visit photos taken in April 2024 show them closer to Willis but still behind the façade of the commercial building.

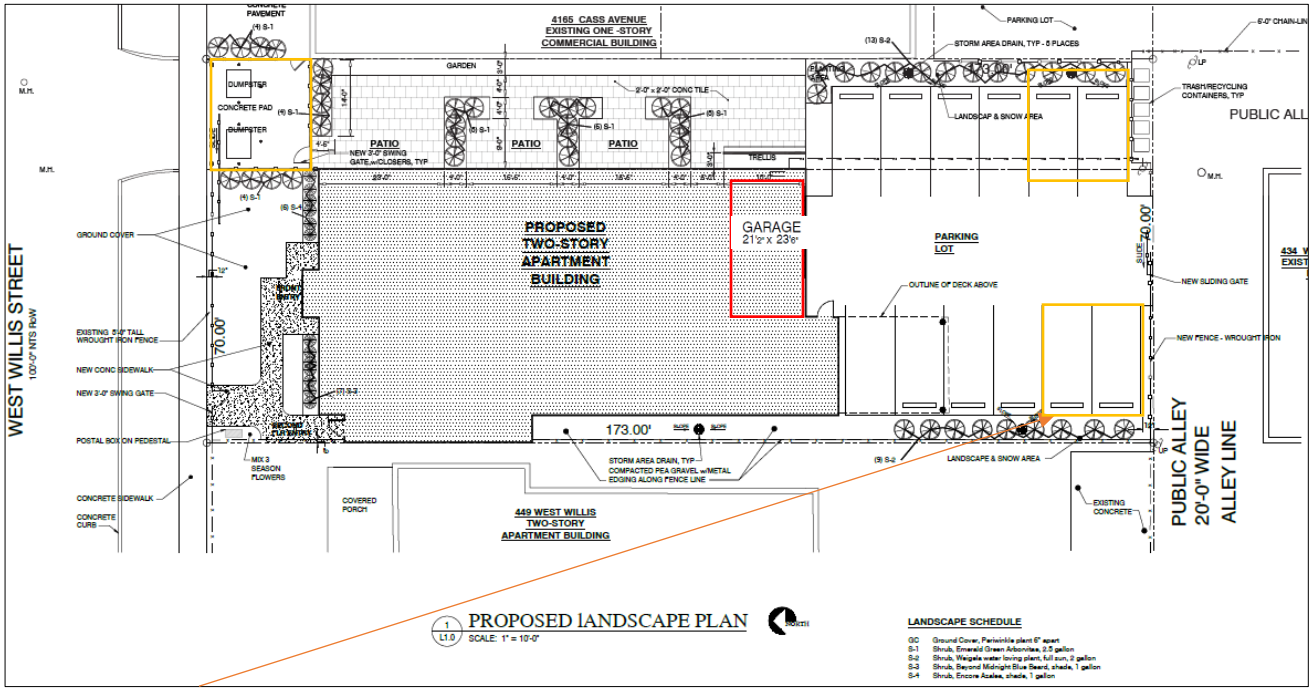


Applicant site plan.

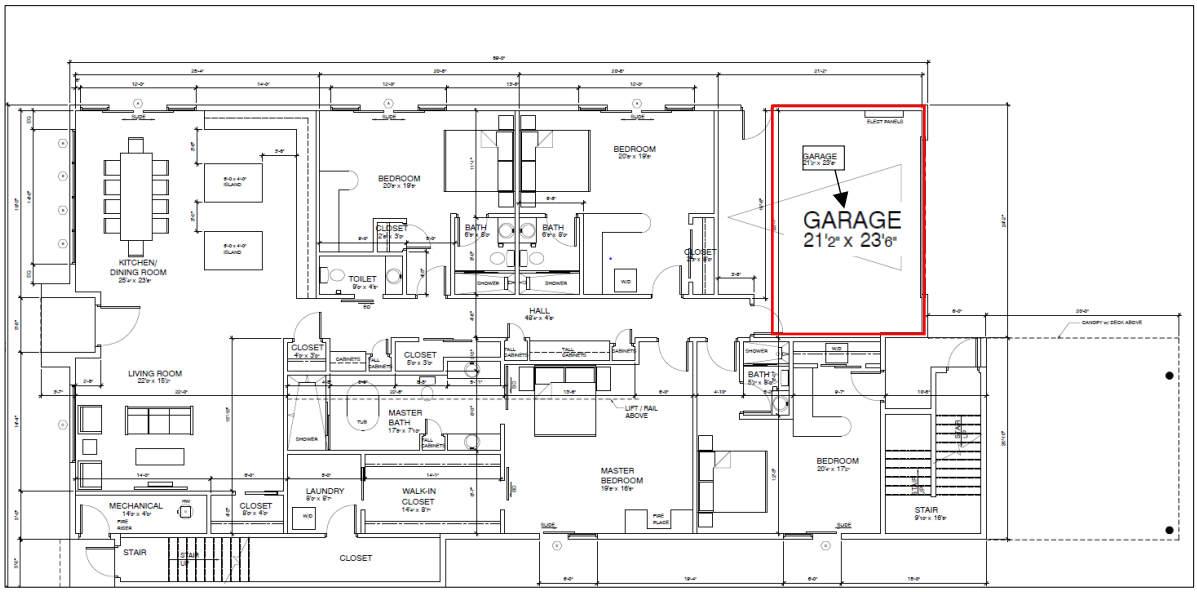
Google street view, October 2020.

Staff photo, April 19, 2024.

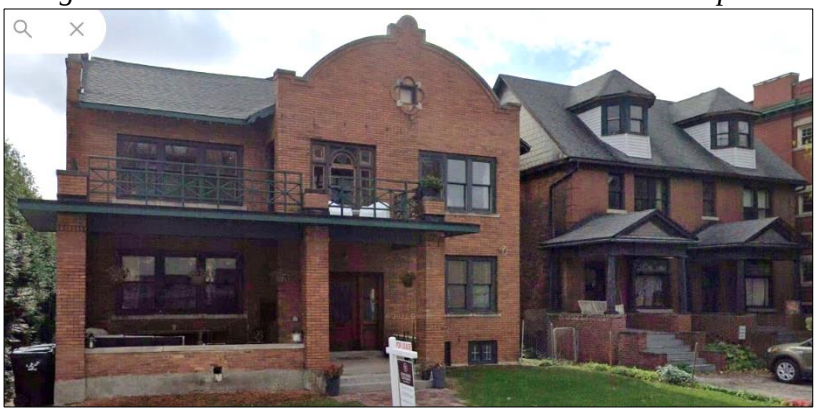
The proposal includes twelve surface parking spaces, but the application doesn't call out the additional two indoor parking spaces designed at the back of the building (which are noted on the first floor's floor plan). Therefore, fourteen spaces were designed for the four-unit building. The applicant states zoning requires one parking space per unit and they wanted to achieve one space per bedroom. Counting the bedrooms: one four-bedroom unit, one three-bedroom unit, and two, two-bedroom units, there are eleven bedrooms in the building. It is staff's opinion the applicant could consider locating the trash enclosure at the top or bottom corner of the parking area, where it could open to the public alley. This would require the loss of probably two parking spots, but the project would stay within the goal of one parking space per bedroom.



Staff copied the space of the trash enclosure at the sidewalk to show how the trash enclosure at the alley could be accommodated by the reduction of two parking spots. This new location would require a redesign of the sliding gate parking lot enclosure; but more importantly, would keep the front yards and streetscape on Willis intact. In the 2020 new building application (site plan on page 2 of this staff report), the trash enclosure was proposed at the southeast corner of the rear lot.

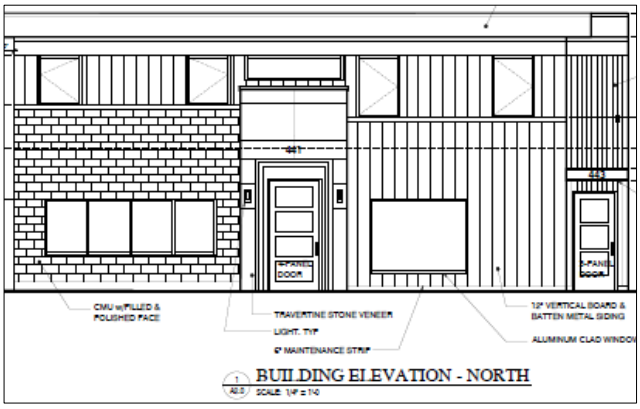


Element 16 - Directional expression of front elevations. *Façades of single-family residential structures are generally vertical in directional expression due to tall window and door openings and peaked rooflines. Apartment buildings generally range from neutral to slightly vertical in directional expression, though a smaller number are horizontal in directional expression.*



Google street view of adjacent buildings. 449 W. Willis 455 W. Willis 469 W. Willis 479 W. Willis

The 3-1/2- and 5-1/2- story apartment buildings (469 and 479 W. Willis) offer highly symmetrical designs, as does the 2-1/2 story dwelling (455 W. Willis). The balanced massing and consistent window/door openings are emphasized by singular contrasting window trim. At 449 W. Willis, the building next door to the subject property, the asymmetrical massing of the house is balanced by the vertical and horizontal alignment of the window and door openings.

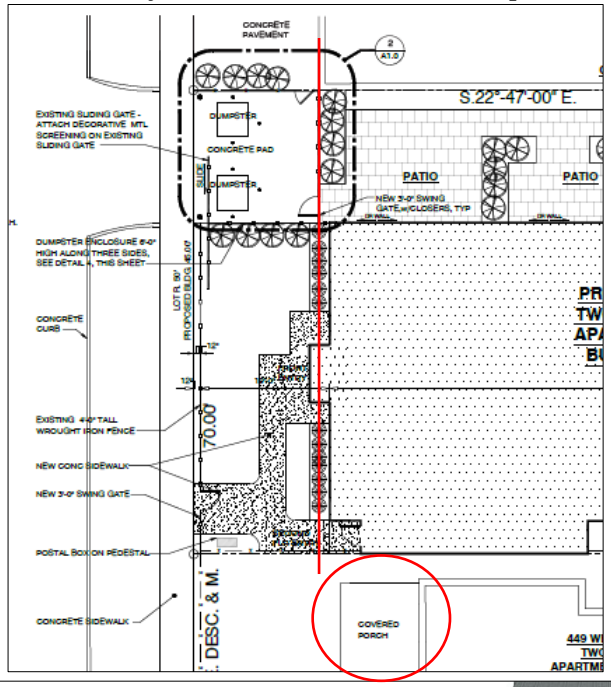


Applicant elevation and rendering. The windows at 449 W. Willis are depicted as casements, but they are 1-over-1 double-hung units.

17) Rhythm of building setbacks *- A degree of irregularity is introduced by varying setbacks of front façades; smaller residential buildings tend to be set back several feet from the public sidewalk, while larger apartment buildings and other buildings often occupy their entire lots. While setbacks may vary slightly from one building to the next, the overall impression is one of a consistent rhythm of building setbacks.*

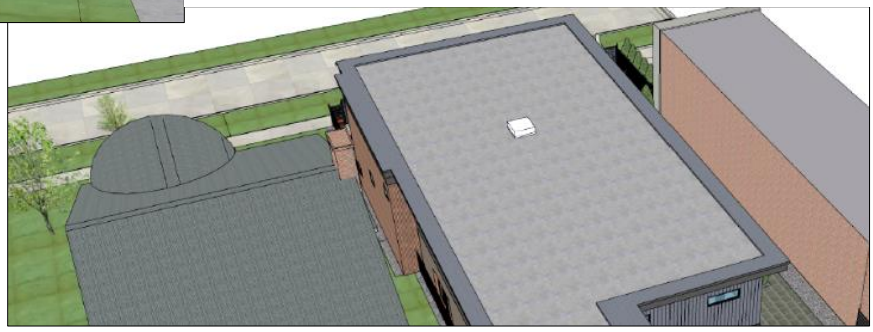
Comparing the site plan and renderings to the aerial view of the buildings, it is staff's opinion the dwelling at 449 W. Willis isn't drawn in the correct location on the site plan and renderings. The front wall of the building proposed at 441 W. Willis should be in line with, or only slightly in front of, the adjacent structures - the rhythm of building setbacks will effectively remain intact.

The site plan submitted with the 2020 application for a new building (shown on page 2) is drawn correctly; staff recommends the site plan be revised accordingly.



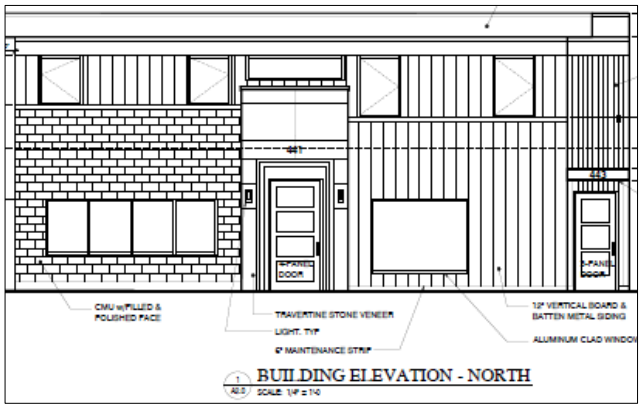
Above: The red line drawn along the front walls of the commercial and residential buildings to the east and west of 441. W. Willis shows the majority of the buildings have identical setbacks, with the exception of 469 W. Willis being set back an additional few feet.

Above left: The applicant's site plan, using the same red line, shows the adjacent house (449 W. Willis) being significantly set back from the sidewalk. This gives the incorrect impression that the new building will break the rhythm of setbacks for this block.



Element 19 - Degree of complexity within the façades. *The façades within the district range from simple to complex, depending upon style. Overall, front façades tend to be simple in their massing and mostly regular in their fenestration, though a variety of window and door shapes, materials, architectural elements, and details of individual buildings increase the overall level of complexity of the district.*

Element 21 - Symmetric or asymmetric appearance. *The appearance of front façades in the district, for the most part, is symmetrical. Single-family residential buildings tend to display a modest degree of asymmetry in massing and architectural detail.*



The applicant's design for the front and side walls is a contemporary design that, in staff's opinion, does not offer a level of balance, due to the irregular placement, size, and operation of the windows, as well as the competing patterns, dimensions, and materiality of the exterior materials. There isn't a strong vertical or horizontal expression, which is inconsistent with the rhythms and patterns of the historic and newly constructed buildings on this street.

ISSUES

- The large number of materials and associated colors and surface finishes for the new development creates an overly complex design when viewed against the small number of materials used on the majority of buildings. The "wood-like" panels and traditional-sized CMU blocks are atypical materials for residential structures in this historic district and are not compatible with the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood and brick.
- The solid walled trash enclosure at the front sidewalk is an incongruous placement within the district. The enclosure eliminates a portion of the front yard of this lot, disrupting the walls of continuity and open space that characterizes the streetscape of the residential block. The selected enclosure material is plastic; the shine and flatness of the manufactured material does not adequately match the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood, and is therefore incompatible for use in the historic district.
- The elements discuss the dominance of repetitive openings on facades, and clear vertical or horizontal directional expression. The asymmetrical design, due to the irregular placement and size of the windows, material transition heights, as well as the competing patterns, dimensions, and materiality of the cladding materials does not offer a balanced composition or directional expression. The proposed application isn't compatible with the consistent rhythms and patterns of the residential buildings in the district.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the proposal should not qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and the Willis-Selden Local Historic District's Elements of Design:

- The large number of materials and associated colors and surface finishes for the new development creates an overly complex design when viewed against the small number of materials used on the majority of buildings. The "wood-like" panels and traditional-sized CMU blocks are atypical materials for residential structures in this historic district and are not compatible with the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood and brick.
- The solid walled trash enclosure at the front sidewalk is an incongruous placement within the district. The enclosure eliminates a portion of the front yard of this lot, disrupting the walls of continuity and open space that characterizes the streetscape of the residential block. The selected enclosure material is plastic; the shine and flatness of the manufactured material does not adequately match the profile, dimensionality, and appearance of wood, and is therefore incompatible for use in the historic district.
- The elements discuss the dominance of repetitive openings on facades, and clear vertical or horizontal directional expression. The asymmetrical design, due to the irregular placement and size of the windows, material transition heights, as well as the competing patterns, dimensions, and materiality of the cladding materials does not offer a balanced composition or directional expression. The proposed application isn't compatible with the consistent rhythms and patterns of the residential buildings in the district.

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission issue a Denial for the work as proposed, as it does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standard 9:

> *9) New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. 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.*

and Willis-Selden Local Historic District Elements of Design:

4) Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades,
6) Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections,
7) Relationship of materials,
8) Relationship of textures,
12) Walls of continuity,
13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments,
16) Directional expression of front elevations,
17) Rhythm of building setbacks,
19) Degree of complexity within the facades,
21) Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.