

STAFF REPORT: SEPTEMBER 11, 2024, MEETING
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00477
ADDRESS: 1760 WABASH
HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN
APPLICANT: TIMOTHY FLINTOFF, 4545 ARCHITECTURE
PROPERTY OWNER: SHARIF AFFAS, DETROIT DEVELOPING PROPERTIES, LLC
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: AUGUST 19, 2024
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: AUGUST 22, 2024

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO
Revised September 10, 2024

SCOPE: ERECT DWELLING AND CARRIAGE HOUSE



1760 Wabash viewed from the southwest. This is a wide parcel, with an existing historic building to the north (left of photo) and the proposed new buildings to the south (right of photo). August 2024 photo by staff.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

1760 Wabash is a double-width parcel (75 feet wide, approximately twice the width of a typical Corktown lot) with a two-story house, built between 1889 and 1897, on its northern half. The southern portion of the parcel formerly contained another house, 1756 Wabash, built prior to 1897 and demolished sometime before the Corktown Historic District was established. The southern portion is now empty lawn space with one ornamental tree. The entire property is surrounded by a chain-link fence, the removal of which has already been approved by the Historic District Commission.



Detroit Parcel viewer image of the subject property.



The subject property viewed from the alley. August 2024 photo by staff.

PROPOSAL

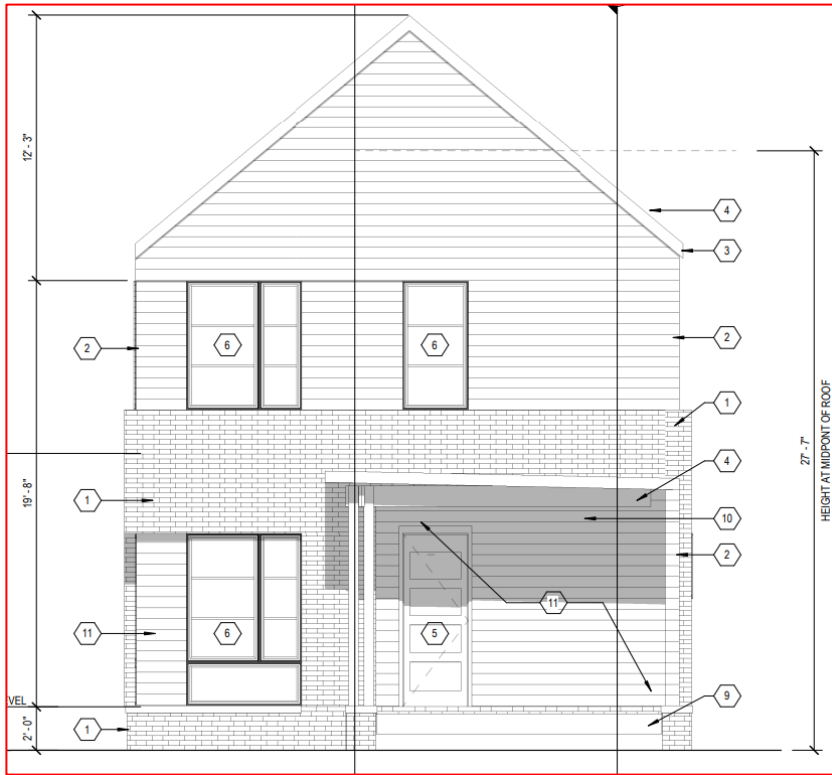
The application is to erect two new buildings: a larger, single-family house in the front of the property and a smaller building, described as a “carriage house,” in the rear. Detailed plans, elevations, and specifications are found in the submitted application materials.



*Rendering of the proposed buildings. Image from **revised** application documents.*

The buildings would be clad in JamesHardie HardiPlank cementitious lap siding with smooth texture, in “iron gray” color, with large expanses of ~~light gray brick~~ **stone veneer**. Recessed areas on the first floor would be clad in stained cedar shiplap siding. Windows would be Andersen 100 Series composite (trade name Fibrex) windows. Doors would be steel.

A 6' horizontal board fence is proposed for the back yard and carriage house. Other, relatively minor, scope items, such as gutters, downspouts, and landscaping, are described in the application materials.



The front (west) elevation of the primary building. Drawing from **revised** application materials.



Left: District View/Phantom Shadow veneer from Evolve Stone. Center: Metal Sales roof panel. Right: Proposed “slate grey” roof panel color. Images from submitted product specifications. Left: “Pewter grey” veneer from Palmetto Brick. Right: CertainTeed Landmark architectural shingles in “pewter.” Photo from lowes.com.

SMOOTH



Proposed siding. Image from application documents.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Corktown Historic District was established in 1984.
- Corktown is characterized by a wide range of architectural styles and building typologies; consequently, a great degree of flexibility is warranted regarding the design of new buildings in the district.
- The Elements of Design for the Corktown Historic District (Sec. 21-2-142) provide guidance regarding the “characteristic relationships of the various features within [the] historic district which are significant to the appearance of the district” (Sec. 21-2-1); appropriate and compatible new development will adhere to most, but not necessarily all, of the defined elements. The Elements of Design for Corktown are as follows (abridged to exclude text that is not pertinent to the proposed scope of work):

- 1) *Height.* Most residential buildings in the district range from one story to 2½ stories tall.
- 2) *Proportion of buildings' front façades.* Proportion varies in the district, depending on the age, style, and type of building. One-story workers' cottages are slightly wider than tall to the peak of the gable; two-story pre-1880's residential buildings are generally taller than wide. Side-by-side duplexes are either wider than tall or square in proportion; terraces or attached rowhouses, when grouped together, are substantially wider than tall, although the individual units may appear taller than wide. Queen Anne-style residences are generally slightly wider than tall or as tall as wide to the eaves of their roofs.
- 3) *Proportion of openings within the façades.* Window openings are usually taller than wide, but there are also square openings and transom window openings which are wider than tall. Several windows are sometimes grouped into a wider than tall combination. Window openings are almost always subdivided; the double-hung sash is the most common window type. Its sashes are generally further divided by muntins, resulting in lights arranged two-over-two, four-over-four, or six-over-six. There is a great variety of sizes and shapes of window openings in the Queen Anne-style buildings, while there is a more regular arrangement in the earlier pre-1880's buildings. Façades have approximately five percent to 75 percent of their area glazed; residential buildings generally fall into the 30 to 35 percent range.
- 4) *Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades.* Pre-1880's buildings in the Italianate and Greek Revival styles display a great regularity in the rhythm of solids to voids, with one opening placed directly above the other. The post-1880's Queen Anne-style buildings exhibit a greater freedom, with their bay windows and combinations of windows in gables.
- 5) *Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets.* The original pattern of spacing of buildings on streets was that of houses placed very close together.
- 6) *Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.* Most houses in the district have projecting front porches, usually on one side of the front façade and sometimes wrapping around to the side.
- 7) *Relationship of materials.* The great majority of buildings in the district are wood frame structures originally clad in clapboard with wooden skirting or brick foundations. Window sash and functional and decorative trim are in wood. Wood is frequently the only material below the eaves of a building, except for the window glass. There are some brick residential buildings in the district, the majority of these being duplexes and multi-unit dwellings. Roofing material is primarily asphalt shingles, although a few wood shingle roofs and one slate roof exist in the district.

- 8) *Relationship of textures.* The most common relationship of textures in the district is that of clapboard to the smooth surface of wood trim.
- 9) *Relationship of colors.* Paint colors in the district generally relate to style. Earlier buildings usually display muted colors, such as earth tones and shades of yellow, while Italianate and Queen Anne-style buildings sometimes display richer and darker colors, such as browns, golds, grays, and blues. Common trim colors include shades of cream, yellow, gray, brown, green, and white. Window sashes are frequently painted white, deep red, brown, and gray. Most asphalt shingled roofs are either in light colors, such as sand, light gray, light brown or light green, or darker colors, such as dark gray, black, or dark green.
- 10) *Relationship of architectural details.* These generally relate to style, and the styles in Corktown run from early Victorian to late Victorian and Colonial Revival. In general, Corktown is rich in its diversity and quality of architectural styles and detail.
- 11) *Relationship of roof shapes.* Pitched roofs with frontal gables predominate in the district.
- 12) *Walls of continuity.* The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings, with their fairly uniform setbacks within blocks.
- 13) *Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.* The typical treatment of individual properties is a shallow flat front lawn area in grass turf, subdivided by a concrete walk leading to the front entrance and sometimes a concrete walk leading to the side entrance. Short concrete walks from the curblin to the public sidewalk are also frequent in the district. Foundation plantings and evergreens are typical plantings in front yards. Chain-link fences predominate as rear yard enclosures; few continue into the front yards. Wood posts and rails with wire mesh are also common fence types found in the district, and a few of these fences enclose the front yard as well as the rear. Many rear garages with alley entrances exist. Concrete side driveways, where they exist, interrupt the succession of front yards and are not the original treatment of the property.
- 14) *Relationship of open space to structures.* Open space in the form of front yards to buildings is generally very shallow.
- 15) *Scale of façades and façade elements.* The majority of buildings in the district are small in scale. Façade elements, such as bays, steep roofs, gables, and/or verandas, are moderate in scale. Details within these elements are generally small in scale.
- 16) *Directional expression of front elevations.* One-story residences are usually slightly wider than tall but their directional expression is vertical due to the gable of the steeply pitched roof. Two-story, Italianate and Greek Revival single-family residences are vertical in directional expression, while duplexes in those styles are usually neutral. Two-story Queen Anne buildings are either neutral in directional expression or have vertically expressed front façades, depending on the projection of gables and/or roof slopes.
- 17) *Rhythm of building setbacks.* Setbacks vary from area to area within the district, although they are usually consistent within blocks. In general, buildings have very shallow front yards, although buildings may relate to the building lines differently due to porch projections and bays where they exist.
- 18) *Relationship of lot coverage.* Lot coverage ranges from zero percent to 100 percent, the average residential coverage being approximately 40 percent.

- 19) *Degree of complexity within the façade.* Early buildings are simple and straightforward. Queen Anne-style buildings are more complex in massing and detail but are not overly complex.
- 20) *Orientation, vistas, overviews.* Buildings west of Rosa Parks Boulevard are most often oriented toward the north-south streets. Garages are oriented toward the alleys.
- 21) *Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.* Most buildings in the district are asymmetrical in appearance, but result in balanced compositions.
- 22) *General environmental character.* The Corktown Historic District, with its narrow lots, shallow front yards, and small-scaled buildings, has a low-density, urban, mixed-use character of a pre-automobile city.

- The applicant argues that the above-referenced Elements of Design are satisfied by the proposed design (see the cover letter included as pages 11–13 of **“Narrative” document included with** the application materials). Staff analysis is provided below.
- In general, the proposed development appropriately infills a vacant lot (created by demolition) with two buildings of compatible scale, setback, and massing. The height, width, and placement of the proposed buildings are comparable to other, historic, buildings on the same block. The proposed work is consistent with the “height,” “proportion of buildings’ front facades,” “rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets,” and “relationship of open space to structures” Elements of Design and reestablishes the lost “wall of continuity” that resulted from the demolition of the historic building.
- The proposed materials and colors are appropriate, **with one exception (see next point)**. The cementitious siding approximates the appearance of wood and is appropriate for new construction, in staff opinion. ~~The buildings also use brick cladding.~~ The proposed “Fibrex” composite material is appropriate for new windows, in staff opinion. **The standing-seam metal roof is a historic material used in a contemporary application.** The grey colors are historically found on buildings in the district and are appropriately employed in a contrasting manner.
 - ~~The brick cladding, though not common in the district, is appropriate. Although the Elements of Design state “there are some brick residential buildings in the district, the majority of these being duplexes and multi-unit dwellings,” this does not mean that brick is reserved only for such buildings.~~
 - **The proposed stone product is not appropriate. Stone is not mentioned in the Elements of Design and not consistent with historic residential buildings in Corktown. The particular specified product is further inappropriate in that it has a noticeably rough and unfinished-looking texture, and, due to its lack of the wider mortar joints used in traditional masonry, a monolithic appearance.**



Evolve Stone veneer image (from product brochure) showing depth of material and thickness of joints.

- **Brick would be appropriate, as t**There are several historical examples of brick single-family houses and garages in the district, including some that employ brick in a contrasting manner with wood elements. **A horizontal, lapped wood siding or wood-like cementitious product would also be appropriate.**



Example brick buildings in Corktown. September 2024 photos by staff.

- The architectural detail is largely compatible and appropriate (with a few exceptions discussed under “Issues,” below). This includes the front-facing gable roof and, importantly, the projecting, off-center porch. Such porches are common and important to the character of the Corktown Historic District. The smooth lap siding and stretcher bond brick are **is** also consistent with the character of the district.
- As described in element #16, “Directional Expression of Front Elevations,” (see also the photos above), residential buildings in Corktown tend to be vertical in emphasis or combine an even balance of vertical and horizontal elements. ~~However, despite being slightly taller than wide overall, the proposed primary building displays an overly horizontal emphasis that is not~~ **The proposed buildings display a slight vertical emphasis, balanced with some horizontal elements, that is** consistent with the character of the district, in staff opinion:
 - ~~The ground floor windows on the front façade are grouped into a single, wide void that provides a horizontal emphasis.~~ **Prominent central mullions on windows provide verticality.**
 - ~~The expanse of brick between the first and second floors provides a wide, horizontal element; this feature is further emphasized by its central location on the façade and that it projects forward from the plane of the façade.~~
 - ~~Of the three windows on the second floor, front façade, two are grouped into an opening that is wider than tall; only one window presents a vertical emphasis.~~
 - ~~The relative lack of window openings on the façade, in general, allows the horizontal lap siding and coursed brickwork to become visually dominant.~~ **The window openings are arranged to divide the front façades of the primary house and carriage house into bays, providing an appropriate vertical emphasis, highlighted by the relatively tall window openings on the first floor.**
 - ~~Although the gable roof is, itself, a vertical feature, this feature is deemphasized by the shallow depth of its eaves.~~
 - ~~While page 12 of the application narrative references element #16 and states that the proposed design is “generally vertical,” staff disagrees, based on the above analysis.~~
- ~~The front façade of the primary building features, in general, a lack of depth that it is out of place and therefore not compatible with the district, in staff opinion. Most notably (and as mentioned in the previous bullet point), the building lacks the projecting eaves typically found on both historic and compatible new buildings in the district.~~

- The blank (that is, not subdivided) casement windows specified fail to provide a sense of depth and texture that typically results from the use of subdivided windows. This is contrary to Element #3, Proportion of Openings within the Facades.



Three Corktown buildings on Wabash that demonstrate how projecting eaves (typical of the district) create a sense of depth. On the twenty-first-century building (left), a sense of verticality is enhanced by corrugated siding and a continuation of the eave down the side of the façade. On the historic buildings (center and right), verticality, depth, and texture, are created by window hoods, projecting gables, and a bay window. September 2024 photo by staff.

- **The proposed buildings deviate from their surrounding context and from the Elements of Design in two additional aspects that, in staff opinion, are relatively minor in scale and therefore do not detract from the overall appropriateness of the proposed buildings; they also provide an appropriate level of differentiation:**
 - **Neither shiplap siding nor unpainted wood siding are mentioned in the Elements of Design or found on historic buildings in Corktown. (The proposed use of stained cedar shiplap siding is limited to relatively small, sheltered areas on the first floor front façade only.)**
 - **The proposed buildings lack the projecting eaves typically found on both historic and compatible new buildings in the district.**

ISSUES

- ~~Due to the horizontal void on the first floor, front façade, of the primary building, the horizontal brick mass between the first and second floors, the window grouping on the second floor, front façade, the relative lack of window openings in general, and the deemphasized gable roof, the building displays a strong degree of horizontality that is contrary to the character of the district.~~
- ~~The building displays a relatively flat, planar façade, lacking the depth that is characteristic of buildings in the district.~~
- ~~The proposed casement windows are not subdivided, as is characteristic of windows in the district. (Page 11 of the application narrative notes, with reference to element #3, that the “individual windows are taller than wide,” but staff opinion is that they should also be subdivided).~~

- The fate of the back yard ornamental tree is unclear from the application documents. Although an individual tree is not always a contributing resource or a character-defining feature, staff considers the mature tree canopy, overall, to be an important character-defining feature of the district as a whole. Any mature tree that is eliminated should be replaced.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff concludes that the proposed development meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and is compatible with the Corktown Historic District Elements of Design, with the following conditions:

- **The stone veneer shall be replaced instead with an alternate product more closely resembling the texture of traditional bricks laid within mortar joints, subject to staff approval (wood lap siding would also be appropriate).**
- **If the mature ornamental tree in the back yard is removed, it shall be replaced with a new ornamental or shade tree elsewhere on the property.**

~~Staff concludes that the proposed development does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the following reasons:~~

- ~~▪ The proposed buildings feature a degree of horizontal emphasis on their primary facades that is not found on historic, residential houses in the district, and is not consistent with the element #16 of the Elements of Design; thus, the architectural features are not compatible with the property and the district.~~
- ~~▪ The proposed buildings display a lack of depth on their primary facades that is inconsistent with historic residential buildings in Corktown; thus, the architectural features are not compatible with the property and the district.~~
- ~~▪ The proposed buildings use casement windows that are not subdivided, contrary to element #3 of the Elements of Design.~~

~~Therefore, staff recommends the Commission issue a *Denial* for the work as proposed because it fails to elements #3 and #16 of the Elements of Design for Corktown and fails to meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation, in particular:~~

~~*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.*~~