

STAFF REPORT: OCTOBER 9, 2024, REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00577

ADDRESS: 5021 TIREMAN (AKA THE BLUE BIRD INN)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BLUE BIRD INN

APPLICANT: JONAH RADUNS-SILVERSTEIN, DETROIT SOUND CONSERVANCY

PROPERTY OWNER: DETROIT SOUND CONSERVANCY

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: OCTOBER 1, 2024

SCOPE: ERECT ADDITION (CHANGES TO PREVIOUSLY APPROVED DESIGN)



Front (north) façade viewed from Tireman Ave. October 2024 photo by staff.



Rear (south) of building viewed from the alley. October 2024 photo by staff.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Blue Bird Inn is a small, single-story, brick commercial building facing north onto Tireman Avenue in the city's historic Old West Side area. The front facade has not changed noticeably since the Historic Designation

Advisory Board Final Report in 2020:

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 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.

The stucco veneer, murals, and hand-painted lettering post-date the Period of Significance. The black security door was also added sometime in recent decades. Also mentioned in the report is a “rectangular cement-block rear addition from 1944” that has since been removed, with Historic District Commission approval, in 2024.

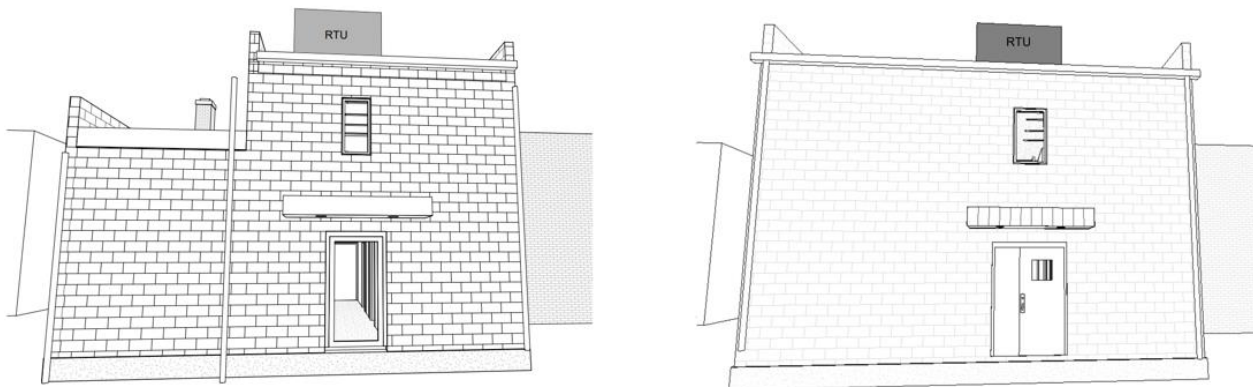
Several work items have been approved by the Historic District Commission but not yet performed. These include the addition of inset sliding aluminum inset windows within the glass block windows on the front façade, installation of a new front door, façade brick and plaster repairs, façade canopy repairs, and LED “neon” sign installation.

Subject of this application, a new rear addition and rooftop HVAC unit was also approved by the Historic District Commission with a Certificate of Appropriateness effective April 18, 2023.

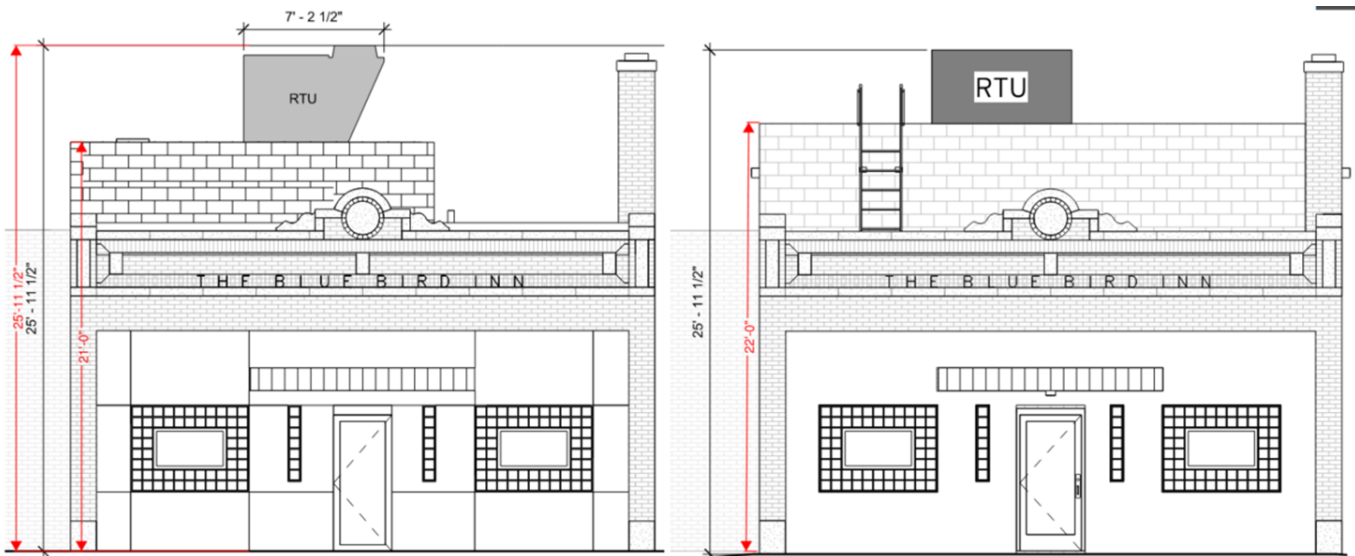
PROPOSAL

The submitted application materials proposed to enlarge the floor area and volume of the previously approved addition. The height of a parapet wall would also increase by one foot (see measured elevations on next page), though the roof and rooftop HVAC unit height would not change.

Other aspects of the addition would remain unchanged: It would be of concrete block, clad in brick veneer, and would be approximately 7 feet taller than the historic portion of the building. It would include rooftop HVAC equipment, a rear entrance door, a small canopy, and a window.



Isometric drawings of previously approved addition (left) and proposed change (right). Images from 2023 and current applications, respectively.



Front elevation showing approved addition (left) and proposed change (right). Image provided by applicant.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

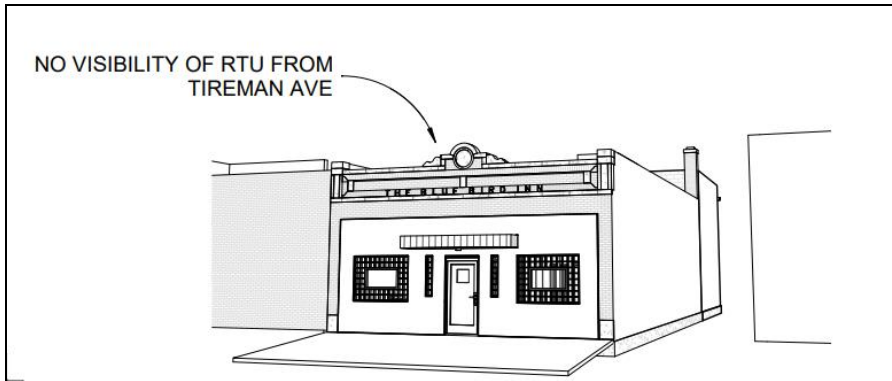
- The Blue Bird Inn Historic District was established by Ordinance 2020-34 in 2020. It is a single-resource historic district with the Blue Bird Inn as its only building.
- In staff opinion, the increased width would not substantially change the character of the proposed addition; the rationale behind the previous approval likewise applies to the new proposal. Important considerations, such as the total height of the addition, the degree at which it is set back from the front façade, and, consequently, the visibility of the addition from Tireman Avenue, remain unchanged. As noted in the April 12, 2023, staff report associated with the previous approval:

The change in height from the core mass to the proposed addition, along with the proposed cladding of the addition in face brick, will render it “clearly differentiated” (Standard #9). Further, the Standards are to be applied “taking into consideration the economic and technical feasibility of each project.”¹ The proposed addition facilitates the proposed rehabilitation of the building by making possible its adaptive use as a music archive and meeting space.

The placement of the proposed HVAC equipment at the highest point of the building is a potential concern, as it may be visible from some vantage points. However, the application states that this is a deliberate choice due to interior acoustic considerations. The application also states that the equipment will not be visible from Tireman Avenue.

- In staff opinion, the increased parapet height of 1’0” is does not substantially change the appearance or appropriateness of the proposed addition. Due to the depth of its setback, it would remain minimally visible from the street. The roof height and the height of the rooftop HVAC unit remain the same.

¹ 36 CFR Part 67.7(b).



Isometric drawing showing visibility of addition from Tireman Avenue. Image from application documents.

ISSUES

- The prior (April 18, 2024) Certificate of Appropriateness approves a proposed addition clad in brick; however, the construction documentation for this proposal appears to depict exposed concrete masonry units. The latter approach may be preferable, as the use of brick has the potential to further enlarge, and draw attention to, the addition and create a color and texture that distracts from, rather than defers to, the historic building, contrary to Standard #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.”

RECOMMENDATION

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

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness, as the proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Elements of Design for the Blue Bird Inn Historic District, with the condition that

- The specification of brick veneer or visible concrete masonry units to be used on the addition shall be subject to approval by staff.