

STAFF REPORT: FEBRUARY 12, 2024 MEETING

PREPARED BY: A. DYE

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2024-00674

ADDRESS: 6134 SECOND AVENUE

HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW AMSTERDAM

APPLICANT: MARY WILLIAMS & DAMANI WALLACE, DCR SERVICES & CONSTRUCTION

PROPERTY OWNER: DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: FEBRUARY 12, 2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 24, 2025

SCOPE: INFILL WINDOWS, ERECT RAMP

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The two-story building erected at 6134 Second Avenue is a six-bay wide structure erected over a raised basement and faced with red brick. The large window openings at the first and second floors are topped with flat arches with decorative stone springers and keystones and have stone sills. The basement windows are wider than tall and have large stone lintels. Steel window sash remain within some basement window openings; two openings are covered with panels. Replacement windows, consisting of mulled fixed units, fill the first and second floor window openings, except for one opening that is bricked in. Two string courses separated by multiple rows of brick delineate the base and parapet of the building.

Decorative masonry corbels are located below the parapet and brick quoins line the edges of the Second Avenue facade. A brick ventilation tower is located on the roof of the building. The main entrance is covered by a contemporary metal awning and was accessible by a ramp that was recently demolished.



Facade facing Second Avenue. HDC staff photo, January 24, 2025.

PROPOSAL

- Remove and replace deteriorated entry ramp and erect new concrete ramp and steps.
- Enclose basement windows on façade with CMU block and brick (to match existing) at exterior.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Amsterdam Historic District was enacted on February 17, 2001. The district is comprised of 23 buildings and is bordered by New Center to the north, Wayne State University's campus to the south, Woodward Avenue to the east and Second Avenue to the west. Early twentieth-century industrial buildings that centered around the automobile industry are the dominant building type, but the district also includes two Detroit Edison substations (one of which is the subject of this application) and a Detroit fire station.



Designation photo, 2001. HDAB.



HDC local historic district map. New Amsterdam district. Location of 6134 Second is identified with a red dot.

- The building was erected by Detroit Edison in 1904 as a substation. A multitude of additions were made to the structure starting in 1910.
- Detroit Edison constructed a second substation on the adjacent property (6126 Second Avenue) in the 1920s. The two stations were connected by a passageway; but the passageway was removed in 1983.
- 6126 Second remains an active DTE substation and 6134 Second is now owned by the Detroit Public Schools. The Detroit Children's Museum has been at this location since 2001.



Streetscape of the east side of Second Avenue, just north of Burroughs. The four-story building to the right of 6134 Second Avenue is the existing DTE substation; a Detroit fire station (Ladder Co. 7/Engine Co. 17) is at the far right. Staff photo, January 24, 2025.

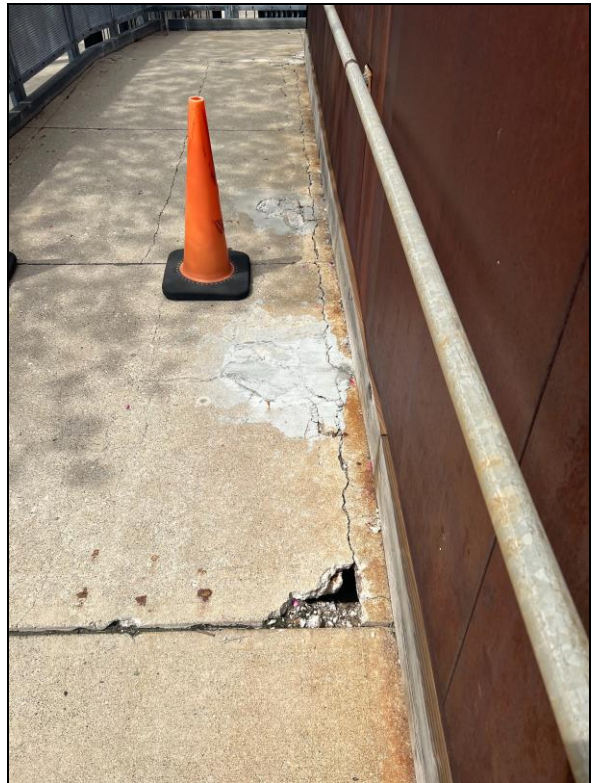
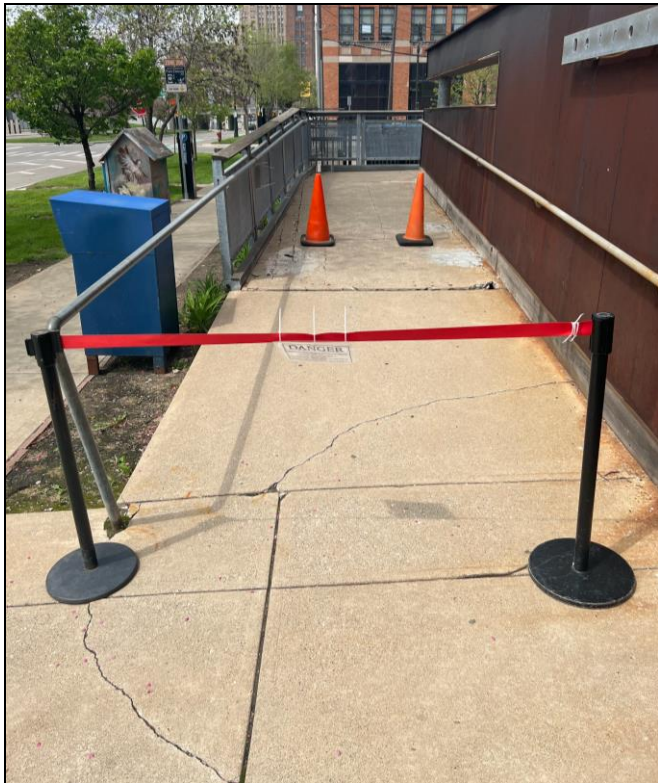
- The ramp was erected circa 2001 for the building's rehabilitated use as the Detroit Children's Museum and it is present in the property's designation photo. It is a contemporary feature to the building and site and its removal is consistent with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.



Applicant photos.



This view shows metal panels that were placed within the basement window openings.



Applicant photographs substantiating areas of deterioration.



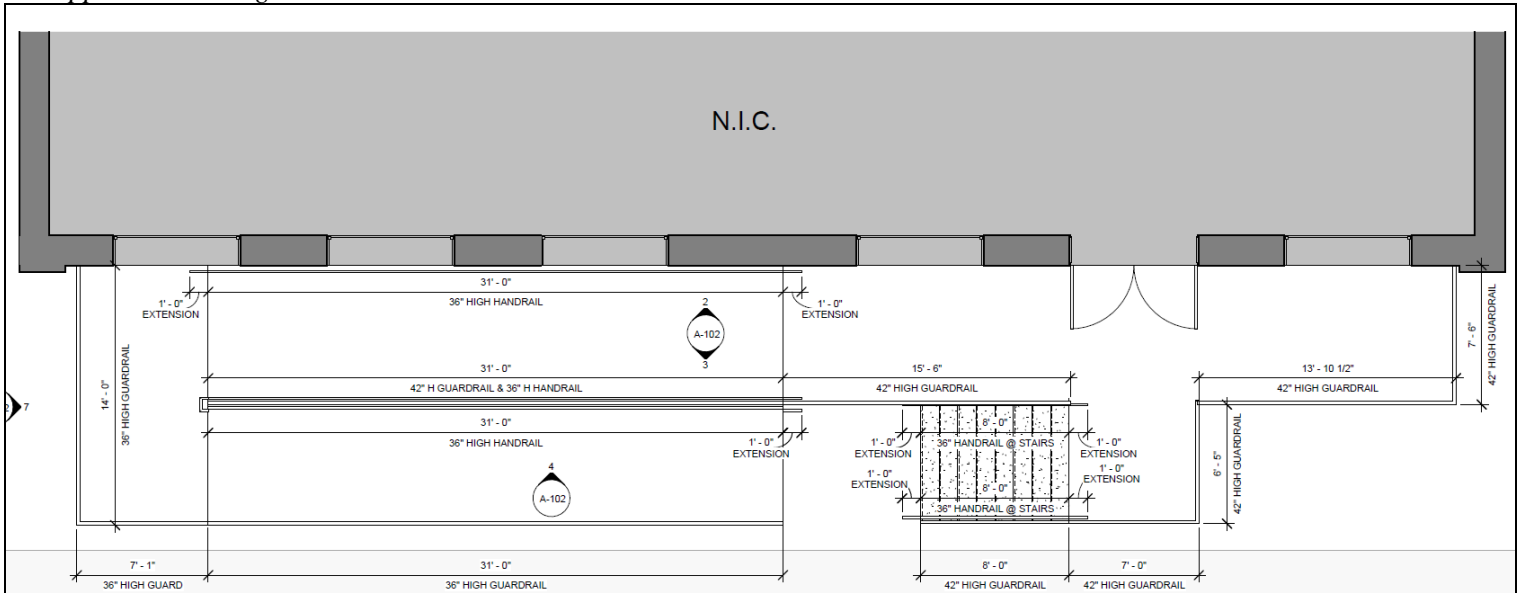
The five basement window openings are visible in the above photo. Two of the openings are covered with panels (metal or wood); the remaining three openings have historic window sash exposed. At right is a close view of one of the steel windows. Staff photos, January 24, 2025.



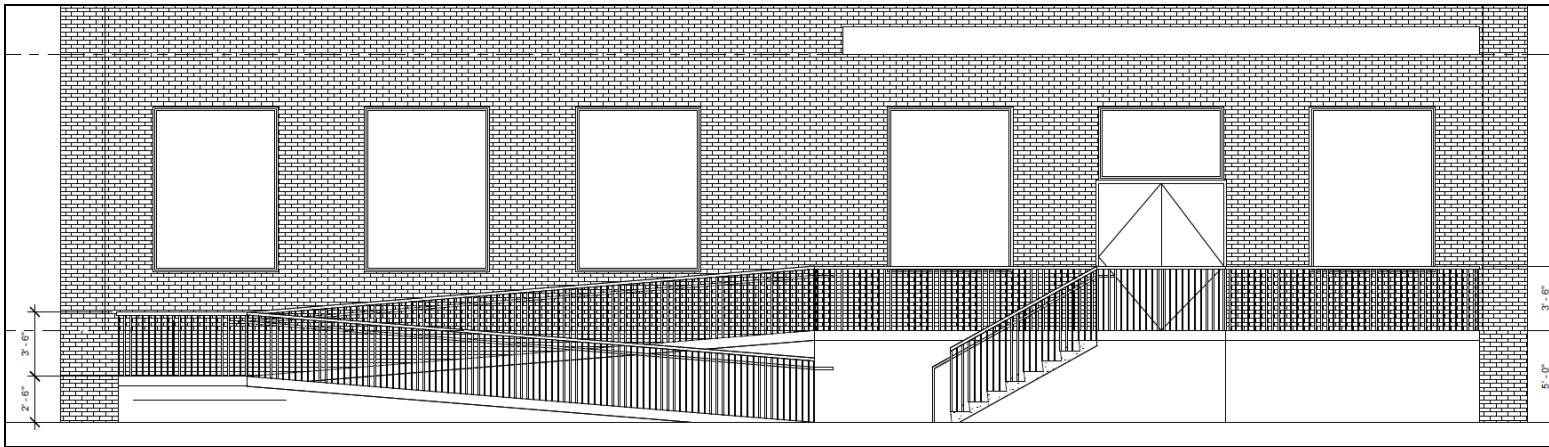
- It is staff’s opinion that the basement windows are not distinctive character-defining features, due to their smaller size, at-grade location, and minimal articulation of the openings – all of which is in contrast with the large window openings at the first and second floors (which have fixed replacement windows).
- As a new ramp is proposed in the same location as the previous ramp, staff agrees with the applicant’s assessment that continued coverage of the window openings with panels would allow consistent water infiltration that could, over time, severely damage the foundation and walls of the building. The applicant’s suggestion to brick in the openings, like the method used at one of the second floor window openings, would create a more weather-tight building while leaving the openings intact for the future installation of windows should the ramp be removed.



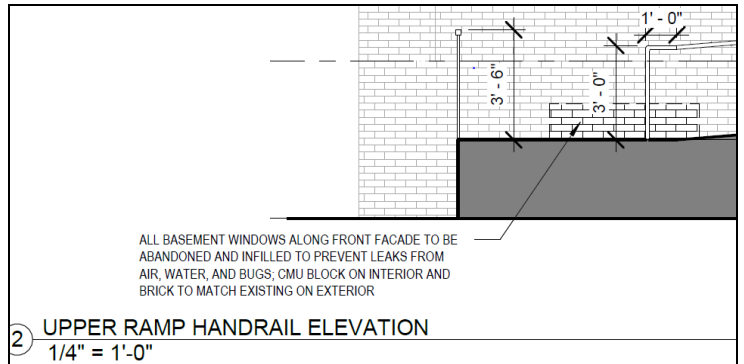
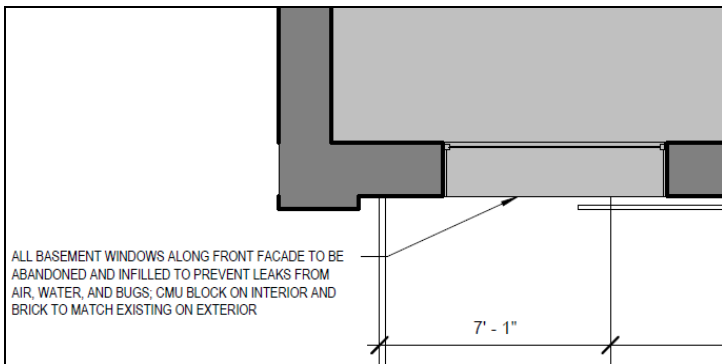
Applicant drawings



Plan view of the ramp and stairs.



Elevation view against the building.



2 UPPER RAMP HANDRAIL ELEVATION
1/4" = 1'-0"

Notes on two pages of the submitted documents reference the infill of the basement windows.

- It is staff's opinion the new ramp's minimal design is compatible with the massing, scale and features of the historic building. Also, the installation and future removal of the ramp will not destroy materials that characterize the property.

ISSUES

- The drawings should note the matching brick within the windows openings will be recessed 1 – 3 inches from the exterior walls.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Certificate of Appropriateness

Staff recommends the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the New Amsterdam Local Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition that:

- The following note will be added to pages A-101 A-102: Matching brick installed within the window openings will be recessed 1 – 3 inches from the exterior walls.