

STAFF REPORT 02-12-2025 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00025

ADDRESS: 23-31 E. ADAMS

AKA: CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

HISTORIC DISTRICT: GRAND CIRCUS PARK

APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: ASHLEY WENDELA/LBBA

OWNER: CENTRAL METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 01-21-2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 01-31-2025

SCOPE: ALTER EXTERIOR INCLUDING STOREFRONTS, WINDOW OPENINGS



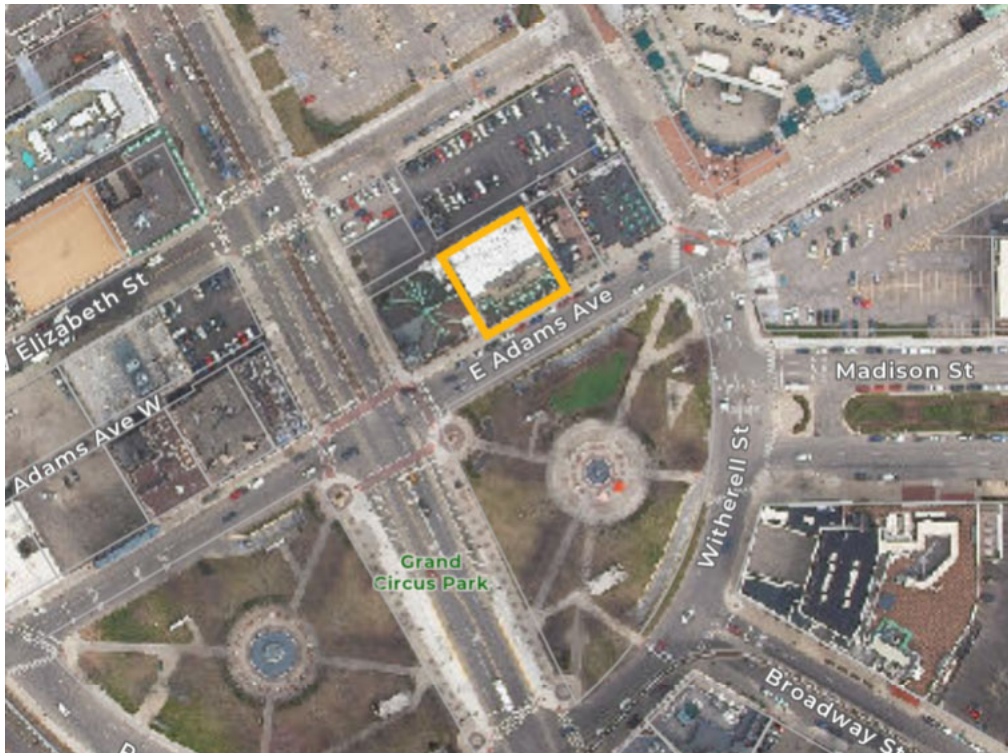
View of 23-31 East Adams, looking northwest along Adams towards Woodward. The 1915 annex or “church house” portion designed by Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls (31 East Adams) is centered in this image. Staff photo, January 31, 2025.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

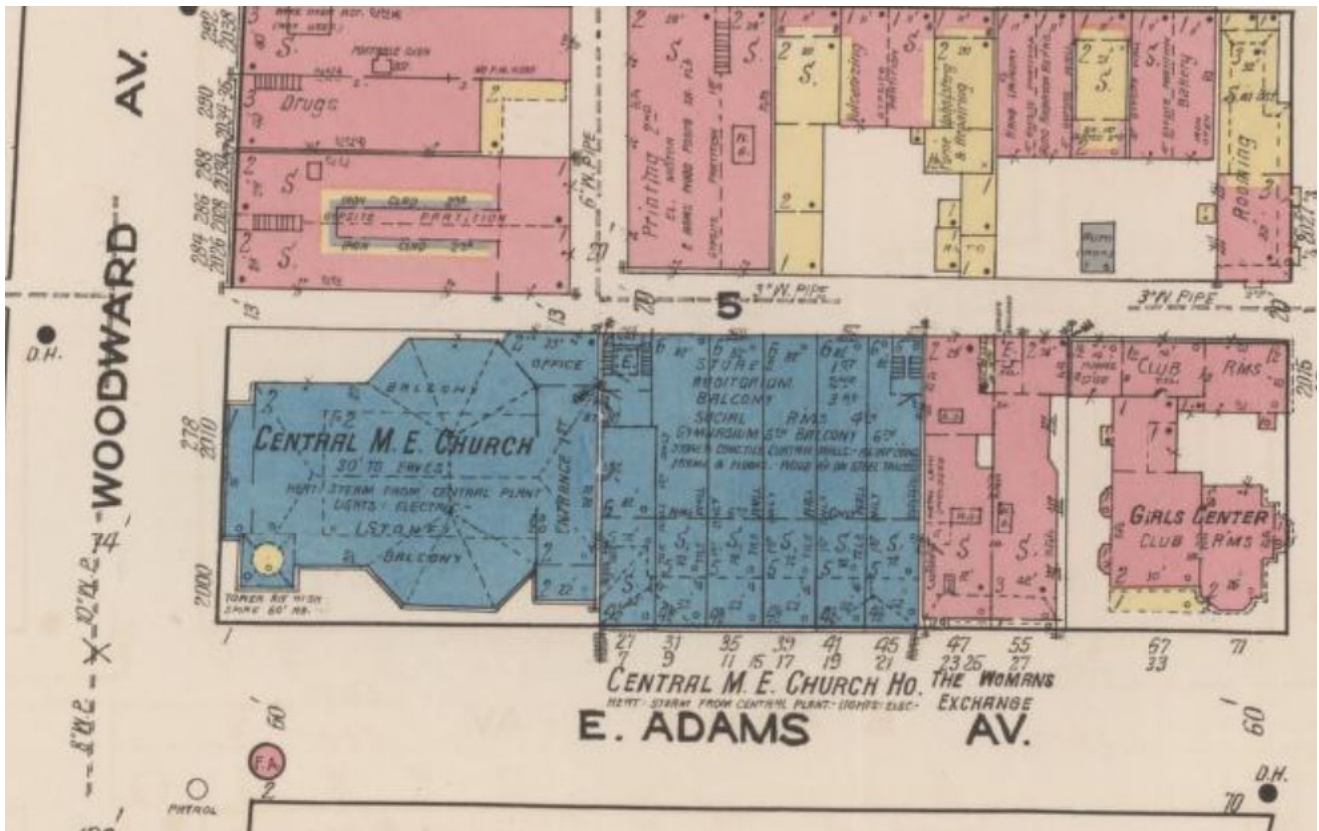
Per the district designation report of the Historic Designation Advisory Board:

Central Methodist Church, a splendid example of Gothic Revival architecture designed in 1867 by an English trained Detroit architect, Gordon W. Lloyd, on the northeast corner of Woodward at Adams, is the oldest building in the district and the only reminder of the nineteenth century neighborhood. Individually listed on the National Register, the building was shortened and the tower moved back when Woodward Avenue was widened in 1935. Continuing eastward on the east side of Woodward Avenue, Adams continues its distinctively English medieval, low scale with the Central Methodist Church Annex (1915) and the Women’s Exchange Building.

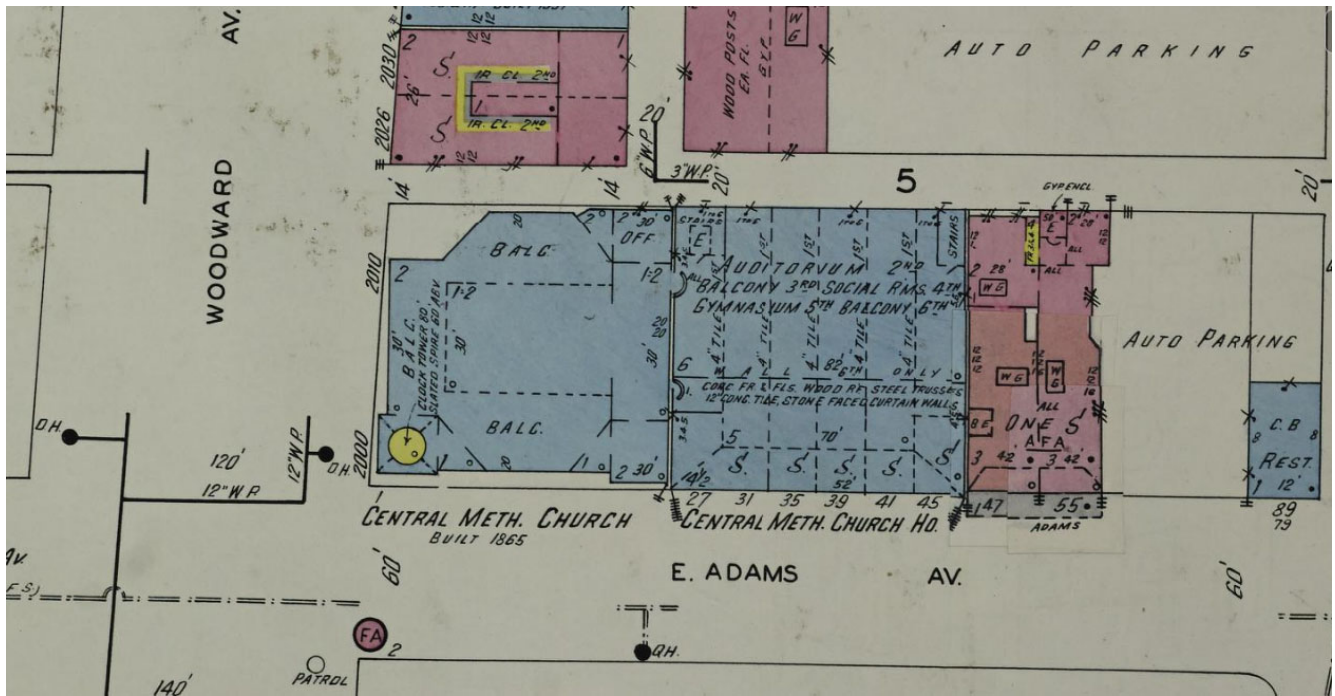
Though not clarified in the HDAB report or the district’s Element of Design, the 1915 annex, or “church house” was designed by Smith, Hinchman, and Grylls. The modern storefronts at Adams, subject of this application, were replaced after the district’s Period of Significance.



Parcel at 31 East Adams per Detroit Parcel Viewer. Compare to Sanborn depictions of parcel at earlier dates, shown on next page.



1921 Sanborn map of vicinity, prior to the alteration to the Church. The church and its annex are shown here as stone/concrete (blue).



1950 Sanborn map of vicinity, after the shortening of the church and the widening of Woodward from 74' to 120'. Compare to previous image.



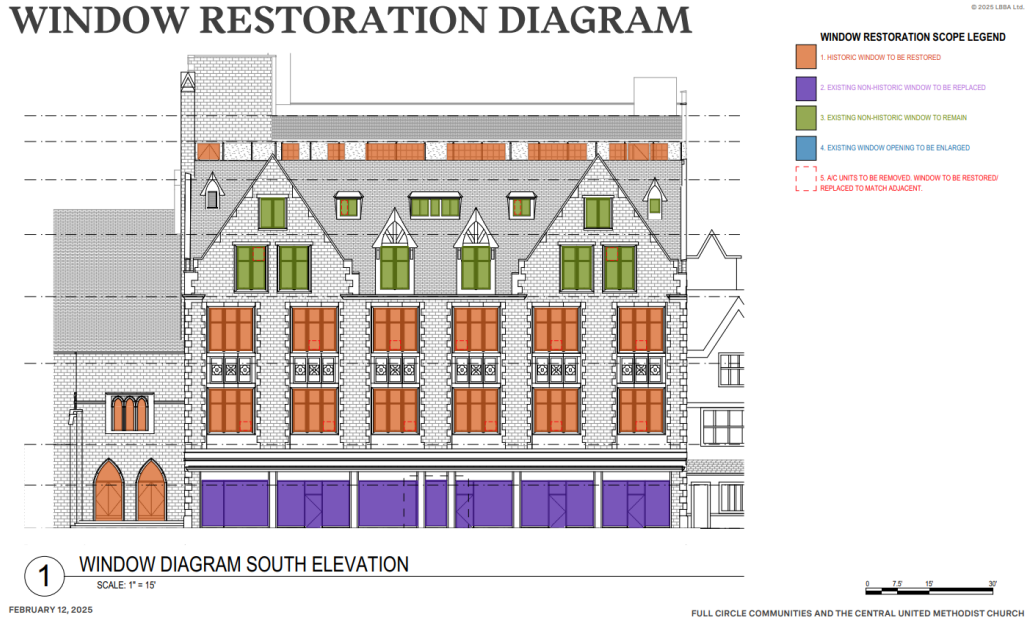
View of 23-31 East Adams, showing typical post-war storefront at Adams elevation. Staff photo, January 31, 2025.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes a comprehensive rehabilitation of the complex to support adaptive reuse of the Church House (1915 annex) into 39 units of permanent supportive housing and future office and service space. The exterior scope of work, per the submitted drawings and documentation, includes:

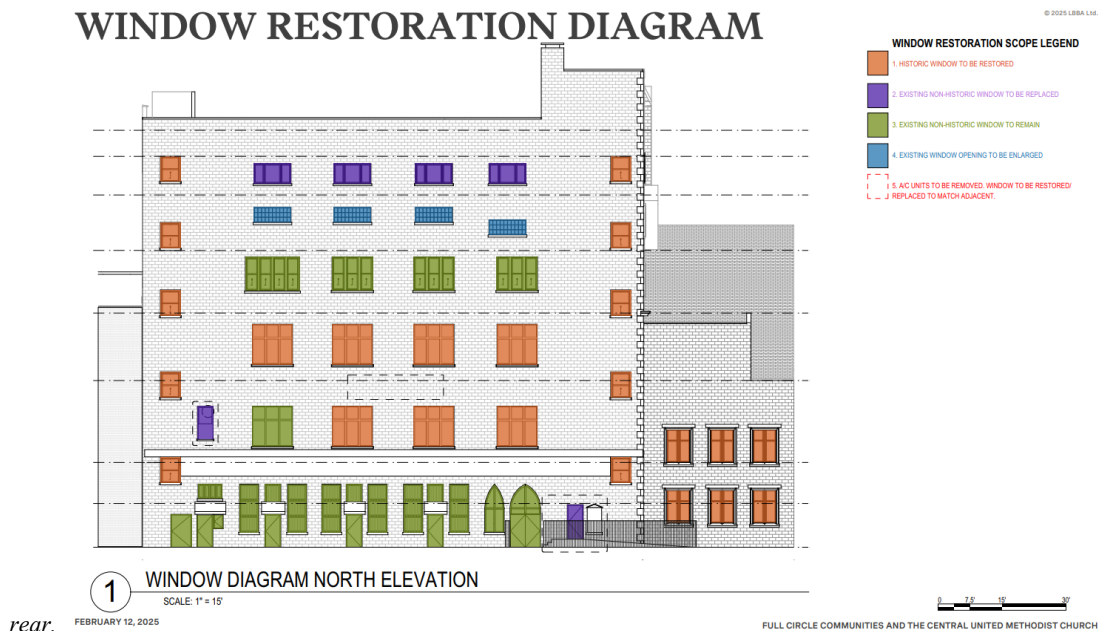
- Restoration of existing historic windows
- Select replacement of existing non-historic windows
- Replacement of Adams storefronts
- Enlargement of a single row of windows at rear, matching existing rhythm
- Restoration/repair of existing slate tile roof
- New membrane roof system at upper roof
- Cleaning of stone masonry facade

WINDOW RESTORATION DIAGRAM



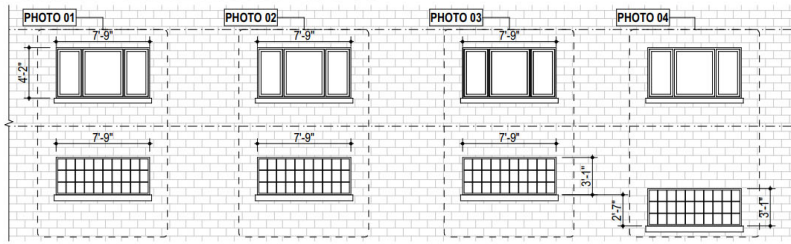
Key from submitted materials showing extent of restoration, and replacement (storefronts only) on Adams façade. Below is rear.

WINDOW RESTORATION DIAGRAM

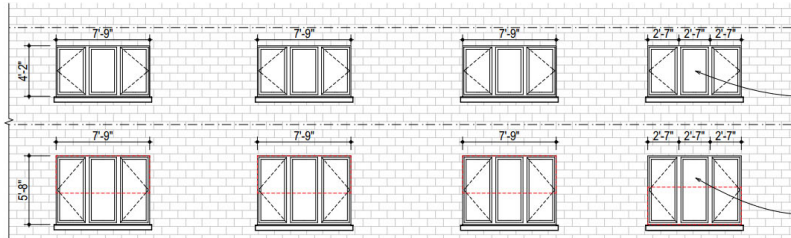


ENLARGED ELEVATIONS

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② PARTIAL NORTH ELEVATION - EXISTING



① PARTIAL NORTH ELEVATION - PROPOSED



FEBRUARY 12, 2025

LBBA

FULL CIRCLE COMMUNITIES AND THE CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Woodward & Adams Permanent Supportive Housing

The third floor row of windows at the rear elevation, currently in a utilitarian vocabulary, are proposed for replacement.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- The Grand Circus Park Historic District was established in 2002. As an aid to understanding historic context and identifying distinctive historic character-defining features for preservation, a period of significance for a district or resource is important. For Grand Circus Park, staff recommended in 2023 (during the park Master Plan review) that a Period of Significance from 1867 – 1930 be established, consistent with the National Register Nomination completed in 1971. A later (2000) boundary increase to the National Register listing included some post-war modern buildings further out, but made no mention of post-war significance for the annex building (or, in particular, its storefronts).
- Selected Elements of the Grand Circus Park Local Historic District Elements of Design (Section 21-2-180), are relevant to the proposed scope (staff underlining for emphasis):

(3)Proportion of openings within the façades. Large, square storefront windows and entrance bays line the ground floor of most buildings, although many are covered with temporary boards or other barriers and, therefore, their actual condition is not visible. Individual window units above the ground floors and/or mezzanines are usually taller than wide but are frequently grouped in openings that are as tall as wide or wider than tall. Openings containing more than three window units also exist. Groupings in arched configurations exist at the upper floors, mezzanine levels, and ground floors of some of the buildings in the district. Double-hung sash windows are prevalent, sometimes with transoms above, with pivot windows and other single-paned types present. Windows are frequently subdivided by muntins. The Central United Methodist Church features Tudor-arched openings and lancet windows with tracery and leaded glass. Where they exist, non-original materials on the façades often obscure the original proportions of openings within the façades. Consequently, areas of voids are approximate, and originally ranged from about one-third to two-thirds of the front façade areas, with the two-story building at 18-24 West Adams Avenue being on the high end of that range due to its large expanses of window area.

(7)Relationship of materials. Building materials common to exterior surfaces in the district are limestone, brick, granite and terra-cotta; modernizations tend to be in granite, glass and steel. Window frames are of wood, cast iron, and/or steel. The Central United Methodist Church and its church house exhibit slate roofs, copper flashing, dormer roofs, and trim. Monuments and fountains feature bronze statues and plaques, and granite or marble platforms or pedestals.

(8)Relationship of textures. The low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick, terra cotta or limestone juxtaposed with smooth masonry trim, where it exists, provides textural interest. Glazed brick, glazed terra cotta, polished granite and large glass surfaces are smooth in texture; carved or molded repetitive ornamental detail in terra cotta or masonry contrasts with the surface material, providing a high degree of textural interest. Where they exist, subdivided windows, parapets, and cornices with repetitive detail are often areas of textural interest. The Central United Methodist Church and its church house have rock-faced ashlar surfaces that result in a rough, rustic appearance. Their slate roofs create a pattern complimentary to the façades. In general, the district is rich in textural relationships.

(9) Relationship of colors. The majority of buildings in the Grand Circus Park Local Historic District are in a light color range. Within this range, many are clad in white or light beige terra cotta, while some are in light gray or beige limestone, and others are in buff brick. Red brick also exists. Window frames tend to be painted in dark tones, such as black, brown or deep green, with a few in light tones, such as light gray. The Central United Methodist Church and its church house have green copper flashing and natural wood doors; colorful stained glass windows provide artistic interest to the church. Monuments and fountains feature verdigris or bronze-color statues and plaques and white marble platforms or pedestals. The original colors of any building, as determined by professional analysis, are always acceptable, and may provide guidance for similar buildings.

(10) Relationship of architectural details. Architectural details generally relate to architectural styles. Early 20th Century buildings exhibit roman arches, cartouches, fluted pilasters, and other Classically-derived details. The Fyfe Building on the northwest corner of Woodward and Adams Avenues and the Central United Methodist Church on the opposite, northeast corner, display details of English-Medieval-influence, such as tracery lancet arches, crenellation, shields and/or finials. On the taller buildings, ground floors, mezzanine levels and the upper levels are frequently areas of ornamentation. Where they exist, cornices are richly ornamented, sometimes with brackets and trim; where cornices have been removed, plain surfaces have replaced them. Spandrels between arches, tops of pilasters, and string courses also tend to be decorated. Storefronts typically have apron walls and large expanses of glass, but are frequently altered or covered over.

- While noting later “modern” additions, the Elements are clearly most concerned with the medieval-inspired window openings, ornamental stone, ornamental copper, and ornamental glass on the subject buildings. The proposed rehabilitation respects and preserves these older features.
- Overall, staff assesses that the application will preserve historic features dating to the Period of Significance. The proposed alterations to the windows at the rear will not affect the historic character of the property, as they are not significant in expressing the property’s historic character.
- Staff supports the proposed alterations as they do not affect character-defining historic fabric as defined by the designation report and Elements of Design. The storefronts, while a serviceable example of mid-century modern architecture, are outside of the district’s defined significance.

ISSUES

- Because the exact storefront and window products for the alterations has not yet been determined, staff recommends the Commission approve the alterations with the condition that staff be delegated final review authority over the final product, configuration and design.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Certificate of Appropriateness

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

- Staff is delegated final review authority over the final product, configuration and design of replacement windows and storefronts in the locations approved by the Commission.