

STAFF REPORT: MARCH 25, 2025 MEETING

PREPARED BY: A. DYE

ADDRESS: 2915 – 2921 GARLAND

HISTORIC DISTRICT: ADJACENT TO OSSIAN SWEET HOUSE

PROPERTY OWNER: DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION, CITY OF DETROIT

SPONSORING AGENCY: GENERAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT, CITY OF DETROIT

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: FEBRUARY 25, 2025

PROPOSED SCOPE: ADVISORY REVIEW: EFFECT OF MEMORIAL PLAZA ON THE OSSIAN SWEET HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT

EXISTING CONDITIONS

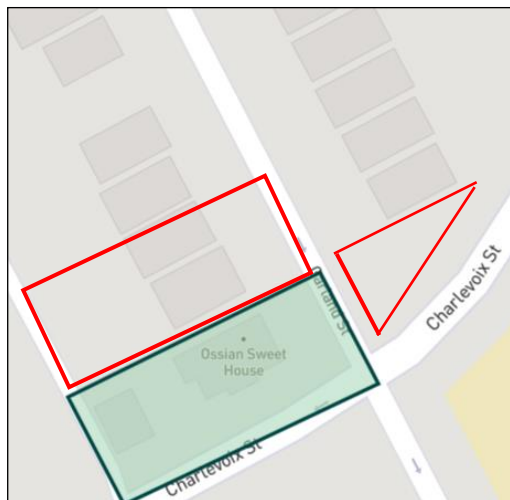
The parcels at 2915 & 2921 Garland are directly north of the Ossian Sweet House and are empty lots with a turf surface. The public right-of-way is on the east side of Garland, at Charlevoix.



Above: View looking northwest at three empty parcels: 2915 – 2925 Garland. The northernmost parcel, 2925 Garland, is not included in this application. The Ossian Sweet House (2905 Garland) is partially visible at left. Staff photo, February 25, 2025.



The public right-of-way at the northeast corner of Garland and Charlevoix. Staff photo, February 25, 2025.



Development parcels outlined in red with respect to the boundary of the Ossian Sweet House historic district.



Looking southwest, this view of 2915 – 2925 Garland captures a full view of the Ossian Sweet House. Staff photo, February 2025.



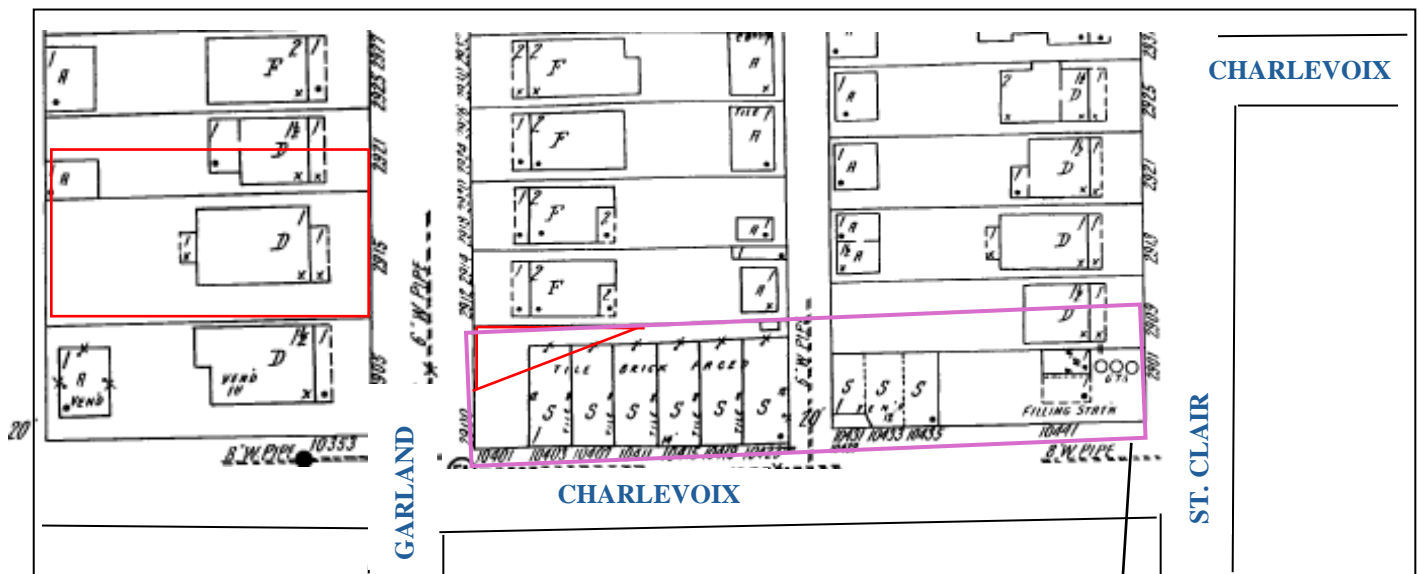
Looking west from Charlevoix, which is the direction of automobile traffic, this view captures the façade of the Ossian Sweet house directly behind the public right-of-way. Staff photo, February 2025.

PROPOSAL

Install a memorial plaza at 2915-2921 Garland and the public right-of-way at northeast corner of Garland and Charlevoix.

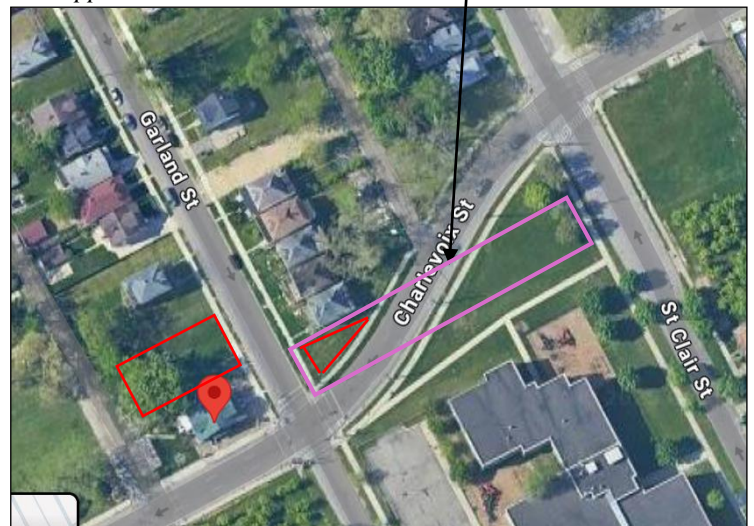
STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Ossian Sweet House Historic District was enacted on May 23, 2006. The district is a single resource district, and was designated due to the events that took place on this site.
- Historically, the parcels to the north of the Sweet House had dwellings on the lots, and the land across the street extended to the south on which attached single-story commercial buildings were located. The 1950 Sanborn maps illustrate the historic street plan and physical landscape of the north side of Charlevoix and Garland.

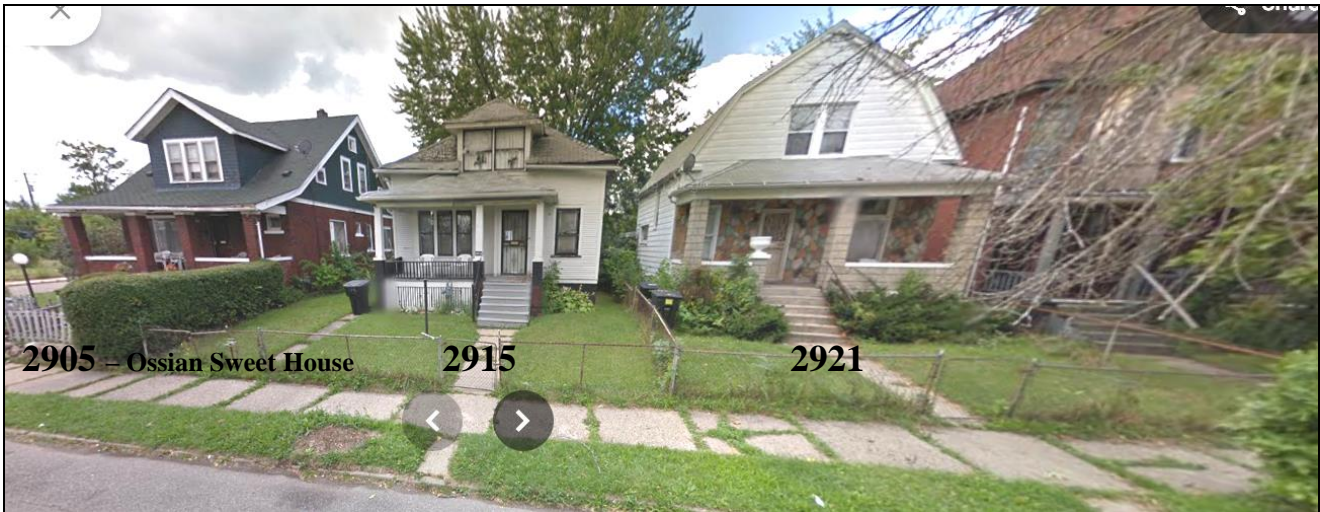


Above: Sanborn map, Vol. 19, 1910-1950. The parcels within this application are outlined in red.

- In the 1950s or 1960s, Charlevoix was redesigned to become a one-way street (heading west) and the sharp turn at St. Clair was removed, leading to the loss of the parcels north of Charlevoix between Garland and St. Clair.

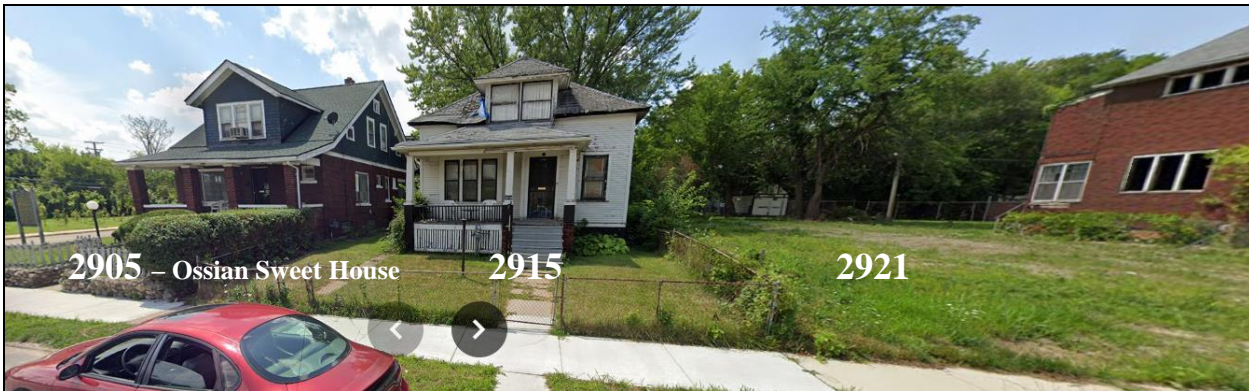


Google aerial view of the current road design of Charlevoix between Garland and St. Clair.



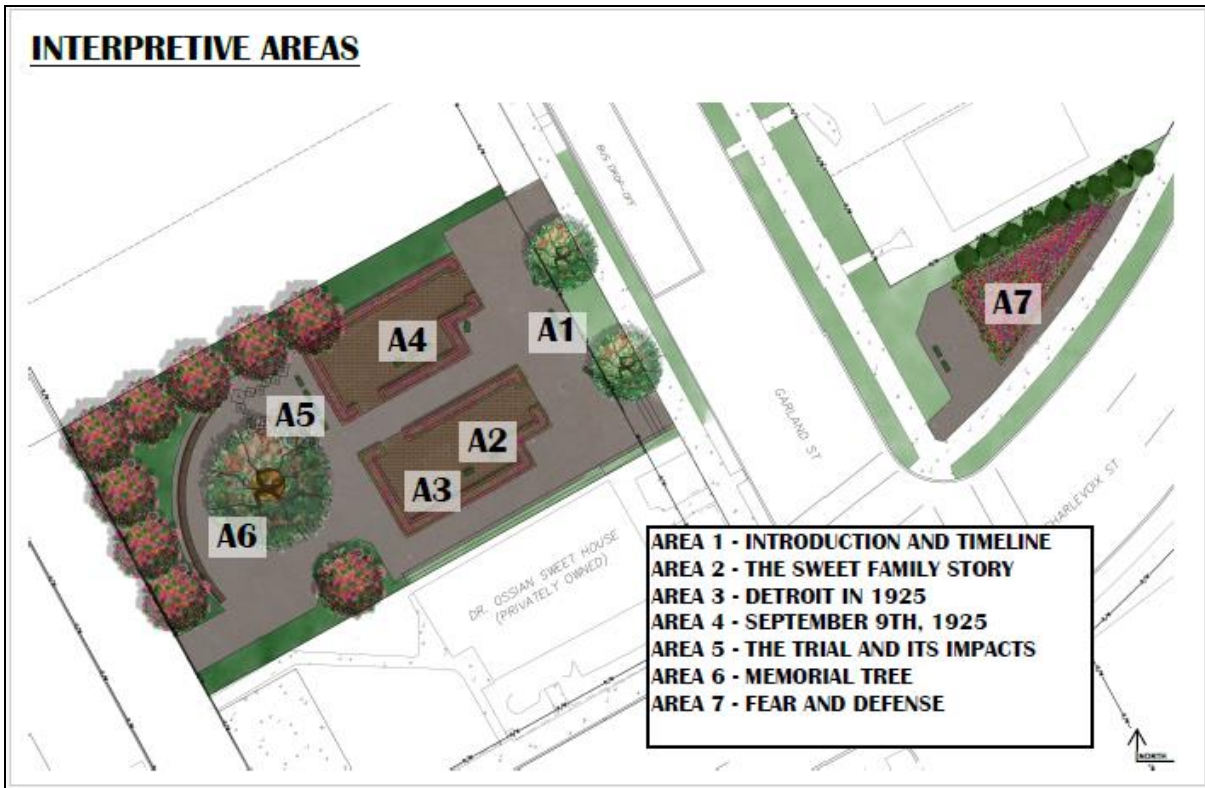
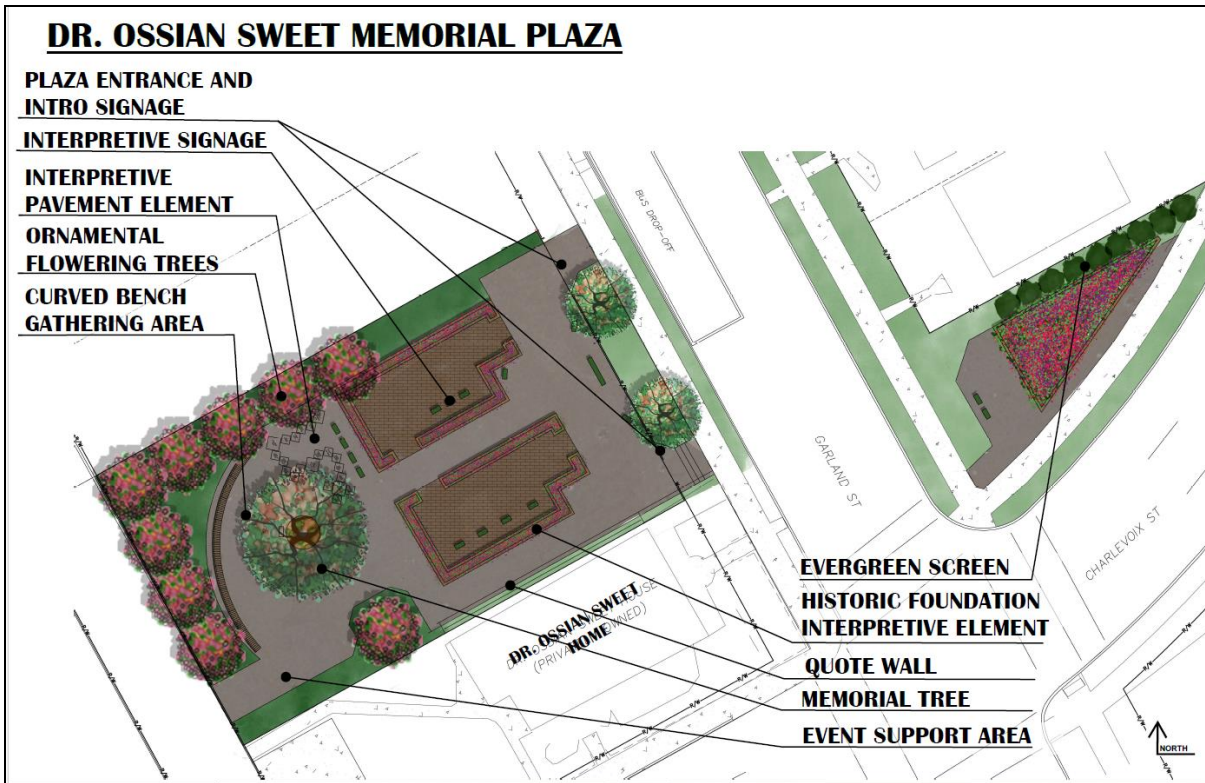
Google street view, September 2013.

- The dwelling at 2915 Garland was erected in 1915; one year before the Ossian Sweet House. The dwelling at 2921 Garland was erected in 1927.



Google street view, August 2018.

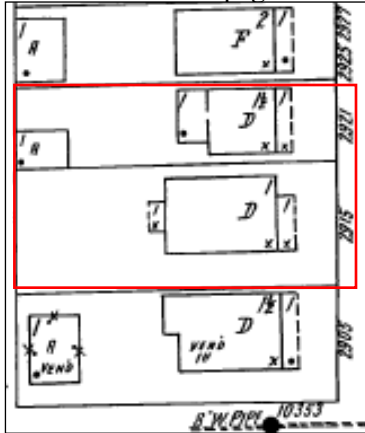
- The gambrel-roofed dwelling at 2921 Garland was demolished in the summer of 2015; 2915 Garland was demolished in August 2021. Both were demolished as the result of fires.
- The houses that were adjacent to the Sweet House were important features against which the Ossian House Historic District should be viewed as they contributed to the high density of this neighborhood in the 1920s.
- More specifically, the house at 2915 Garland played a direct role in the events of September 9, 1925, as the house physically shielded the Sweet house's rear porch from view on Garland. During the evening of September 9th, two members of the Sweet party were on the rear porch and fired at the taunting mob gathered on Garland. The medical and police forensic reports, as discussed in the trial, determined the shots that hit two men on Garland were fired from the second floor rear porch of the Sweet house. The man who was standing on the porch stair at 2914 Garland later died, and the 11 people in the Sweet house that evening were arrested for murder.
- According to the City of Detroit General Services Department website, "The City of Detroit General Services Department was awarded funding from the American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") to fund two initiatives pursuant to the development of a public space that commemorates and memorializes the history and legacy of Dr. Ossian Sweet and the influence of the events that unfolded in 1925: an outdoor Educational Plaza and Historic Interpretive Master Plan. The Educational Plaza adjacent to Dr. Sweet's home will combine the area of the two (2) adjacent parcels: 2915 Garland and 2921 Garland. The total acreage of the new Educational Plaza will be approximately .2 acres."



Applicant drawings.

- The proposed work does not encroach upon the boundary of the local historic district. The Commission is reviewing this proposal in an advisory capacity to determine the effect it will have on the Ossian Sweet Historic District.

- The proposed site plans give an indication as to the overall design for the memorial plaza. Outlines denoting two houses, and the use of contrasting ground material within the building outlines, are key components to the understanding and interpretation of the physical aspects of the surrounding area, as it relates to September 1925.
 - However, staff noticed that the outlines of the two houses do not match the massing/footprints of the demolished houses.
 - Sanborn maps identify the properties to the north of the Sweet house as 2915 and 2921 Garland. However, Detroit Parcel Viewer shows the land divided into three lots: 2915, 2921 and 2925 (which was initially mentioned on page one of this report). 2925 Garland is not owned by the City of Detroit.



Left: 1950 Sanborn Map

Right: Detroit Parcel Viewer.

The red outline on both maps match each other, but the white lines on the parcel map indicate current property lines.

The City of Detroit owns the lots at 2915 and 2921 but does not own 2925 (indicated by blue star).

The house that was in place at 2921 Garland spanned both lots (2921 and 2925) as seen in the below aerial image.



- The significance of the properties as they relate to the events of September 9, 1925 is exceptionally strong, and staff suggests that an accurately-sized outline and placement of the footprint for 2915 Garland be imbedded into the plaza design, as well as an accurately-sized footprint of 2921 Garland be placed in its historic location, with the footprint stopping at the north lot line. Staff can't stress enough the importance that the physical scale and location of the demolished properties be included in the plaza design and interpretation of the Ossian Sweet house.



May 2011



April 2018

Aerial views of 2905 – 2925 Garland. ConnectExplorer. Ossian Sweet House HD outlined in blue.



Left: Approximate massing of 2915 Garland and a portion of 2921 Garland superimposed on the draft site plan for the memorial plaza.

It is not clear to staff from what source the proposed dimensions and building footprints were selected.

- Staff is supportive of the development of the plaza, as well as including the public right-of-way on the other side of the street. As the whole area surrounding the Charlevoix/Garland intersection was a part of the events leading up to and on the night of September 9, 1925, including ways that this can be physically demonstrated on additional parcels is very important. However, staff would like to reiterate the importance that the design of the plaza and information presented on the signage be historically accurate.
- Independent of the memorial plaza (and not part of this project), work is occurring to the two-family houses at 2912-2914 and 2918-2920 Garland. This reconstruction work is being completed under the auspices of the Housing Revitalization Department, under their Bridging Neighborhoods Program, which funds home repair and home rehabilitation programs.



Existing conditions, April 2024. HDC staff photo.



Staff photo, February 25, 2025. According to the trial testimony, the man who was shot (and later died) had been standing on the steps of the porch at 2914 Garland.

ISSUES

None.

COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission, per Section 21-2-5 (Effects of Projects on Districts), is asked to provide comment concerning the “demonstrable effects of the proposed project and report same to the Mayor and City Council.” The intent of this section is to provide guidance to city government prior to committing to a particular course of action, under the following requirement:

A City-financed, licensed, permitted, authorized or contracted physical development project shall be considered to have a demonstrable effect on a designated or proposed historic district when any condition of the project creates a change, beneficial or adverse, in the quality of the historical, architectural, archeological, engineering, social or cultural significance that qualified the property for designation as an historic district or that may qualify the property for designation as an historic district.

Generally, adverse effects occur under conditions which include:

- (1) Destruction or alteration of all or part of a resource;*
- (2) Isolation from or alteration of the surrounding environment of a resource;*
- (3) Introduction of visual, audible, or atmospheric elements that are out of character with the resource and its setting;*
- (4) Transfer or sale of a City-owned resource without adequate conditions or restrictions regarding preservation, maintenance, or use; and*
- (5) Neglect of a resource resulting in its deterioration or destruction.*