

**STAFF REPORT: MAY 14, 2025 MEETING**  
**APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00164**  
**ADDRESS: 1535 BROADWAY**

**PREPARED BY: A. DYE**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: BROADWAY AVENUE**  
**APPLICANT: ZACHARY MEERS, CITY OF DETROIT-CITY WALLS**  
**PROPERTY OWNER: MICHAEL AND STACY SIMMONS, SIMMONS & CLARK JEWELRY**  
**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: APRIL 21, 2025**  
**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: MAY 2, 2025**

**SCOPE: PAINT MURAL ON BUILDING**

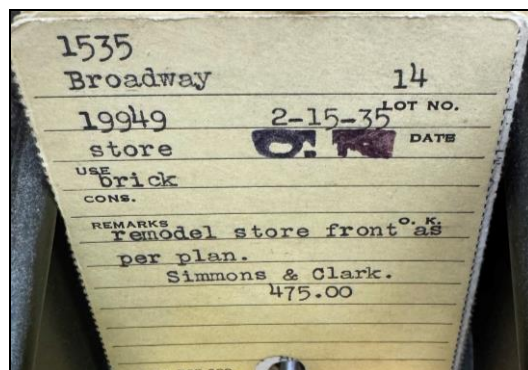
### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

1535 Broadway is a two-story building on the west side of Broadway, between Witherell and John R. The Historic Designation Advisory Board's Broadway Avenue Local Historic District Final Report states:

*While its finely-detailed terra cotta Classical Revival facade featuring an entablature of swags, festoons and wreaths and fluted pilasters with leafy capitals is perfectly intact above the first story, the building is most recognizable for its remodeled first floor. Simmons and Clark, a subsequent owner of the building, replaced the original storefronts in 1935 (Alt. permit #19949, 2-15-1935) with an exquisite structural glass with silver aluminum highlights in an art deco style. The single recessed entrance is flanked by horizontal storefront windows that curve around the corner to the doorway without interruption. Black structural glass frames the windows and spans the wide surface at mezzanine level, highlighted at the corners by a simple geometric step-like pattern and, in the center above the doorway, a highly stylized geometric motif with curves extending from its top. Above this is the name, SIMMONS & CLARK, in Moderne typography. A centered, hanging metal and neon sign at the second story level advertises the jewelry store still there today.*



Staff photo, May 2, 2025.



BSEED permit card for the storefront remodeling.

## PROPOSAL

- Simmons and Clark is celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and would like to commemorate this event with a mural that ties the company to the community. Two sizes have been proposed for consideration. The artwork has not been decided upon; it will be advertised for artists to submit a proposal through an open call and committee review/decision.

*Option One: 25'W x 30'L = 750 square feet*



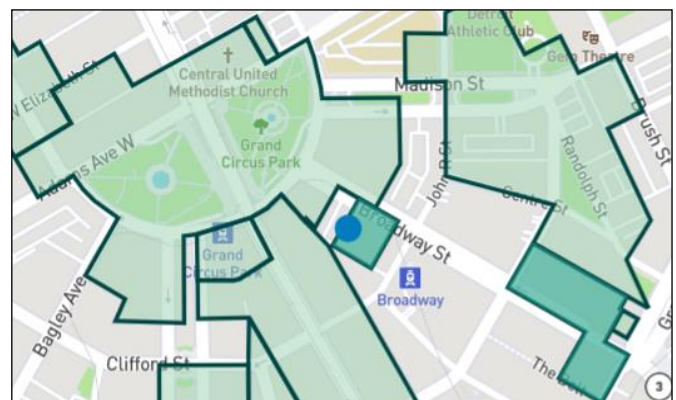
*Option Two: 35'W x 35'L = 1,225 square feet*



## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Broadway Avenue Local Historic District was enacted on August 28, 2005, and is comprised of fifteen commercial buildings located in two noncontiguous blocks of Broadway Avenue between Gratiot Avenue on the southeast and Grand Circus Park (Witherell) on the northwest. The buildings included in the district range in date of construction from c. 1896 to 1926, and in height from two to fourteen stories.

*Right: HDC map, Broadway district boundaries are highlighted in dark green.*



- The district's designation report says that in 1908 a building permit was issued to the Vinton Company,

contractors, for the construction of a two-story commercial building at 1535 Broadway. McNaughton-McKay Electric Company, electrical supplies, were the first owners.

- Per Simmons & Clark's website:

*Fred Simmons and Harry Clark established Simmons & Clark Jewelers on Broadway in downtown Detroit, Michigan. They met while working for another jeweler. They borrowed \$5,000 and opened their store in October 1925, just in time for the busy holiday season.*



Above: Circa 1923 photo of Witherell and Broadway, looking southwest. The Madison Theatre is in the foreground. The two-story extension facing Broadway with stores at the first floor, disguised the sloping downward roof of the theatre's auditorium. Burton Collection.

Right: The close-up of the southern end of Broadway shows 1535 Broadway (boxed out in yellow), in which "Dave's Auto Insurance" was located here. The bottom of the J.F. Hartz Co. sign (1529 Broadway) is still slightly visible on the 2025 photo on the following page. An additional story was erected on this building in 1926-1927. Staff believes the façade was remodeled or "modernized" at that time.





View of the north wall of 1535 Broadway which captured a partial view of the exposed north wall for 1529 Broadway. Ghost signs are evident on both buildings' walls. The arrow identifies the remnants of the medical sign visible in the 1923 photo.

- The north wall of the Simmons & Clark building is clad with common brick, and the terra cotta on the façade extends to the north wall only slightly at the front corner.
- The ghost signs are important features of the district and should remain intact when possible. Staff recommends the Commission select the 25'W x 30'L mural size and location for the following reasons:
  - The mural will not cover nor alter any distinctive character-defining features of the building.
  - The mural won't remove, cover, nor alter the existing ghost signs.
  - The 25' x 30' mural is more proportional to the existing signs and the two-story masonry wall.
  - The mural will also leave most of the brick wall unpainted, allowing the wall to retain its permeability to shed water.
- Prior to painting the masonry surface, an inspection of the wall surface - the brick and mortar - should be completed. Identifying disintegrating mortar, cracks in mortar joints, loose and/or delaminating bricks and damp walls should be addressed. Should tuck-pointing be required, duplicating the old mortar in strength, composition, color and texture is imperative. Also, the width and joint profile of the existing mortar joints shall be matched.
- The selected coating should be highly breathable (vapor permeable) to allow moisture in the brick to escape and evaporate, preventing damage to or deterioration of the wall.

### City Walls Program

- Background information copied from the city's website:
  - *The City of Detroit launched the City Walls program in the Summer of 2017. The new initiative integrates a multifaceted approach to enhancing public space by focusing on an essential urban element: the city wall.*
  - *The goals of the program are to highlight the values and the identity of the communities where artwork is being created, empower Detroit artists, and to provide a positive cost benefit to the public via art versus the cost of blight remediation. In recognizing that the number one goal is to highlight the values and the identity of the community, the program puts an emphasis on a reversed engineered approach to content development insuring that the art develops organically and holistically within the community by the community.*
- The City Walls program remains active; in 2025, the City of Detroit commissioned 43 artists to install art installations in nine City-sponsored arts alleys across the city.

### **ISSUES**

- None.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

#### Section 21-2-78, Determination 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 Broadway Avenue Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition that:

- The ghost signs shall remain in place. The Commission selected the 25'W x 30'L mural size and location for the following reasons:
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