STAFF REPORT: MAY 14, 2025 MEETING *5/13 Correction made on page 9* **PREPARED BY**: A. DYE
APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00193
ADDRESS: 2012 WABASH
HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN
APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: MARC GRASSI, PUSH DESIGN
PROPERTY OWNER: BRETT BABIN & VIVEKA MISHRA
DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: APRIL 21, 2025
DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: MAY 2, 2025

SCOPE: ERECT SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLING, INSTALL ROOFTOP SOLAR PANELS

EXISTING CONDITIONS
The parcel at 2012 Wabash is a 25' wide lot on the east side of Wabash, three lots north of Marantette. Grass and gravel cover the lot. A wood picket fence, almost in line with the front wall of 2014-2016 Wabash (property to the left), closes off the front of the lot, and a chain link fence closes off the rear of the lot, at approximately the rear wall of 2006 Wabash. There is a small red maple tree centrally placed in front of the picket fence; a large tree is centrally located in back of the fenced-in yard.

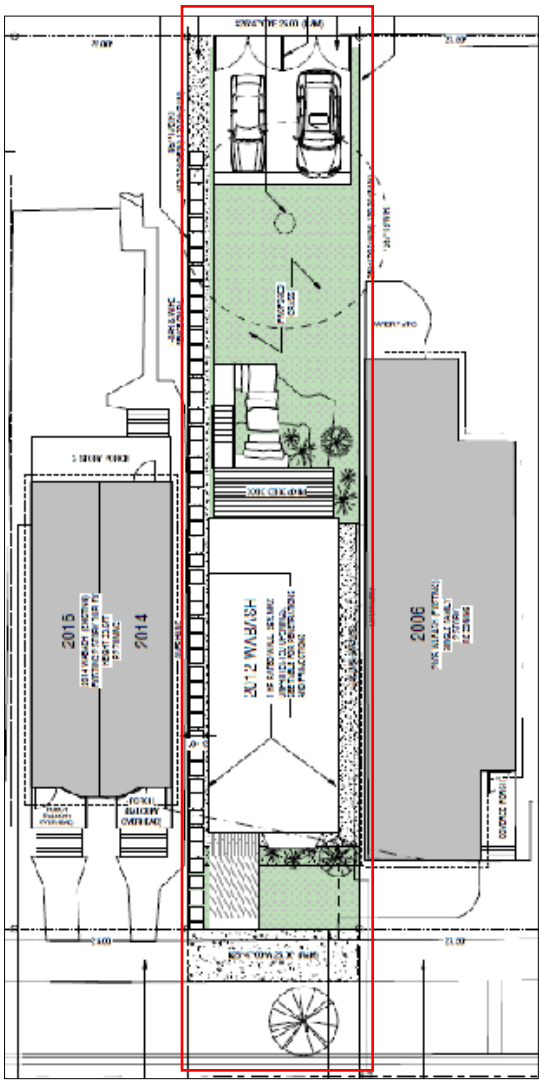
Above: View looking east from Wabash - 2014-16 (left), 2012 (center) and 2006 (right). Staff photo, May 2025.

Right: View of large tree on 2012 Wabash lot, looking east. Staff photo, May 2025.

Left: Detroit Parcel Viewer of the northeast corner of Wabash and Marantette. Property is outlined in yellow.

PROPOSAL

Per the submitted drawings and documents, the applicant proposes to erect a two-story, with basement, single-family house. The dwelling will feature thermal modified wood siding, metal shiplap siding and a metal standing-seam roof. Solar panels are proposed for the south-facing roof. The site plan shows the rear yard tree will be retained.



Applicant's renderings and site plan of the proposed dwelling.

Top left: Façade facing Wabash.

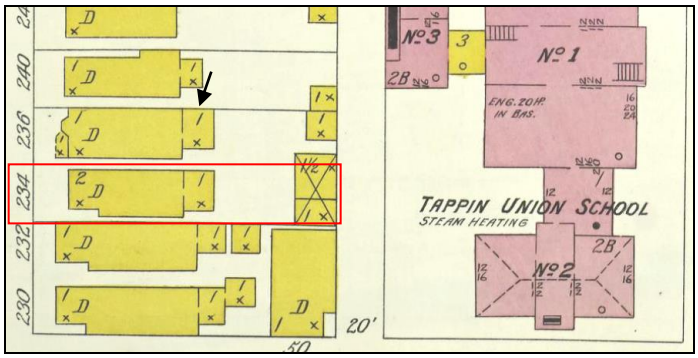
Top right: Site Plan, oriented east/west – Wabash is at the bottom and the alley at the top. 2012 Wabash is outlined in red.

Middle: View looking southeast of the façade and north-side elevation.

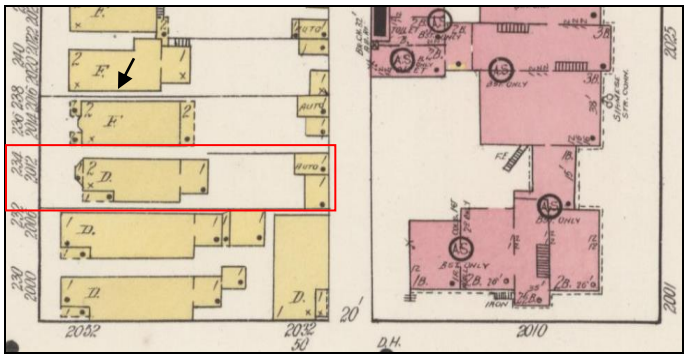
Bottom: Rear/east elevation.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Corktown Historic District was established in 1984; the non-contiguous expansion of the district occurred in 1998. The district's Final Report states: *It contains approximately 280 structures, most of which are small-scale residences built in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Over ten of the structures are commercial in use and less than ten are in institutional or religious usage…Its diversity of architectural styles is representative of working-class housing from the late 1840s to the early 1900s and its combination of land uses typifies development in the nineteenth century walking city.*
- The Sanborn Maps, and BSEED building card, offer a brief glimpse of the history of 2012 (234) Wabash.

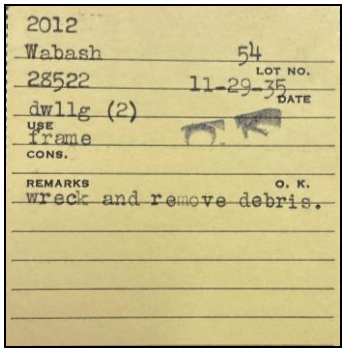


Vol. 1, 1897 Vol. 1 Sanborn map.

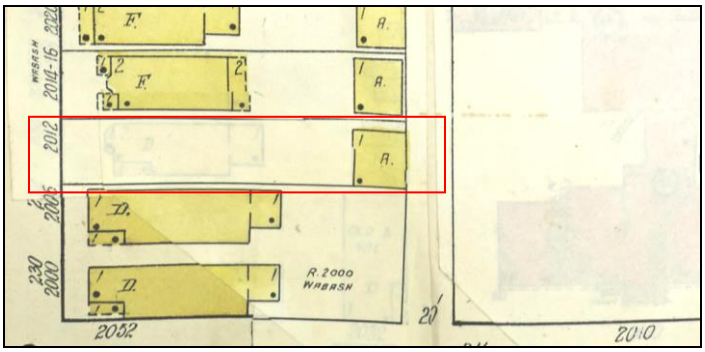


Vol. 1, 1921 Sanborn map

The number in the top left corner of each wood-framed (yellow) dwelling indicates the number of floors.


2012
Wabash 54
28522 LOT NO.
11-29-35 DATE
dwllg (2)
USE
frame
CONS.
REMARKS O. K.
wreck and remove debris.

BSEED card approving demolition of house



Vol. 1, 1950 Sanborn map showing dwelling gone

- The Sanborn maps show the now-demolished dwelling at 2012 Wabash was a two-story house and centrally located amongst single-story houses; the dwelling was demolished in 1935. The maps also show changes were made to the house directly north at 2014-2016 (236) Wabash, as it went from a single-story house to a two-story house between 1897 and 1921.

2014-2016 Wabash *2012 Wabash* *2006 Wabash* *2000 Wabash*

Staff photo, May 2025.

- The Elements of Design for Corktown should be referenced when new construction is proposed. Staff listed the elements that are relevant to this application, underlining added for emphasis.

(1) Height*. Most residential buildings in the district range from one-story to 2½ stories tall.*

(2) Proportion of buildings' front façades. Proportion varies in the district, depending on the age, style, and type of building. *One-story workers' cottages are slightly wider than tall to the peak of the gable; two-story pre-1880's residential buildings are generally taller than wide…Queen Anne-style residences are generally slightly wider than tall or as tall as wide to the eaves of their roofs.*

(3) Proportion of openings within the façades. *Window openings are usually taller than wide, but there are also square openings and transom window openings which are wider than tall. Several windows are sometimes grouped into a wider than tall combination. Window openings are almost always subdivided; the double-hung sash is the most common window type. Its sashes are generally further divided by muntins, resulting in lights arranged two-over-two, four-over-four, or six-over-six. There is a great variety of sizes and shapes of window openings in the Queen Anne-style buildings, while there is a more regular arrangement in the earlier pre-1880's buildings. Façades have approximately five percent to 75 percent of their area glazed; residential buildings generally fall into the 30 to 35 percent range.*

(4) Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades*. Pre-1880's buildings in the Italianate and Greek Revival styles display a great regularity in the rhythm of solids to voids, with one opening placed directly above the other. The post-1880's Queen Anne-style buildings exhibit a greater freedom, with their bay windows and combinations of windows in gables.*

(5) Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets. *The original pattern of spacing of buildings on streets was that of houses placed very close together. Most houses were situated on 25-foot lots…Houses on narrow lots were usually placed on or closer to a side property line, providing more space on one side of the building.*

(6) Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections. *Most houses in the district have projecting front porches, usually on one side of the front façade and sometimes wrapping around to the side, especially on corner lots. Some Victorian houses have a secondary porch at the side.*

(7) Relationships of materials. *The great majority of buildings in the district are wood frame structures originally clad in clapboard with wooden skirting or brick foundations. Window sash and functional and decorative trim are in wood. Wood is frequently the only material below the eaves of a building, except for the window glass. Roofing material is primarily asphalt shingles, although a few wood shingle roofs and one slate roof exist in the district.*

(8) Relationship of textures. *The most common relationship of textures in the district is that of clapboard to the smooth surface of wood trim…Porches are usually in wood, although some have brick piers. Steps are either in wood, which was the original material, or concrete.*

(9) Relationships of colors. *Earlier buildings usually display muted colors, such as earth tones and shades of yellow, while Italianate and Queen Anne-style buildings sometimes display richer and darker colors, such as browns, golds, grays, and blues. Common trim colors include shades of cream, yellow, gray, brown, green, and white. Window sashes are frequently painted white, deep red, brown, and gray. Wood shingle roofs are a weathered cedar tone, while most asphalt shingled roofs are either in light colors, such as sand, light gray, light brown or light green, or darker colors, such as dark gray, black, or dark green.*

(10) Relationship of architectural details. *These generally relate to style, and the styles in Corktown run from early Victorian to late Victorian and Colonial Revival. In general, Corktown is rich in its diversity and quality of architectural styles and detail.*

(11) Relationship of roof shapes. *Pitched roofs with frontal gables predominate in the district, although pitched roofs with side-facing gables, hip roofs, and hip roofs with intersecting gables also exist. More complex roof shapes occur primarily on Church Street.*

(12) Walls of continuity. *The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings, with their fairly uniform setbacks within blocks. Mature and recently planted trees along the tree lawns create a secondary wall of continuity.*

(13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. *The typical treatment of individual properties is a shallow flat front lawn area in grass turf, subdivided by a concrete walk leading to the front entrance and sometimes a concrete walk leading to the side entrance. Short concrete walks from the curbline to the public sidewalk are also frequent in the district. Foundation plantings and evergreens are typical plantings in front yards …Chain-link fences predominate as rear yard enclosures; few continue into the front yards. Wood posts and rails with wire mesh are also common fence types found in the district, and a few of these fences enclose the front yard as well as the rear.*

(14) Relationship of open space to structures. *Open space in the form of front yards to buildings is generally very shallow.*

(15) Scale of façades and façade elements. *The majority of buildings in the district are small in scale, with the exception of multi-story industrial buildings and apartment buildings, which are medium to large in scale and, therefore, do not comply with the original scale of the neighborhood. Façade elements, such as bays, steep roofs, gables, and/or verandas, are moderate in scale. Details within these elements are generally small in scale.*

(16) Directional expression of front elevations. *One-story residences are usually slightly wider than tall but their directional expression is vertical due to the gable of the steeply pitched roof. Two-story, Italianate and Greek Revival single-family residences are vertical in directional expression, while duplexes in those styles are usually neutral.*

(17) Rhythm of building setbacks. *Setbacks vary from area to area within the district, although they are usually consistent within blocks. In general, buildings have very shallow front yards, although buildings may relate to the building lines differently due to porch projections and bays where they exist. Buildings on the north-south streets and corners are very close to the front lot lines.*

(18) Relationship of lot coverage. *Lot coverage ranges from zero percent to 100 percent, the average residential coverage being approximately 40 percent.*

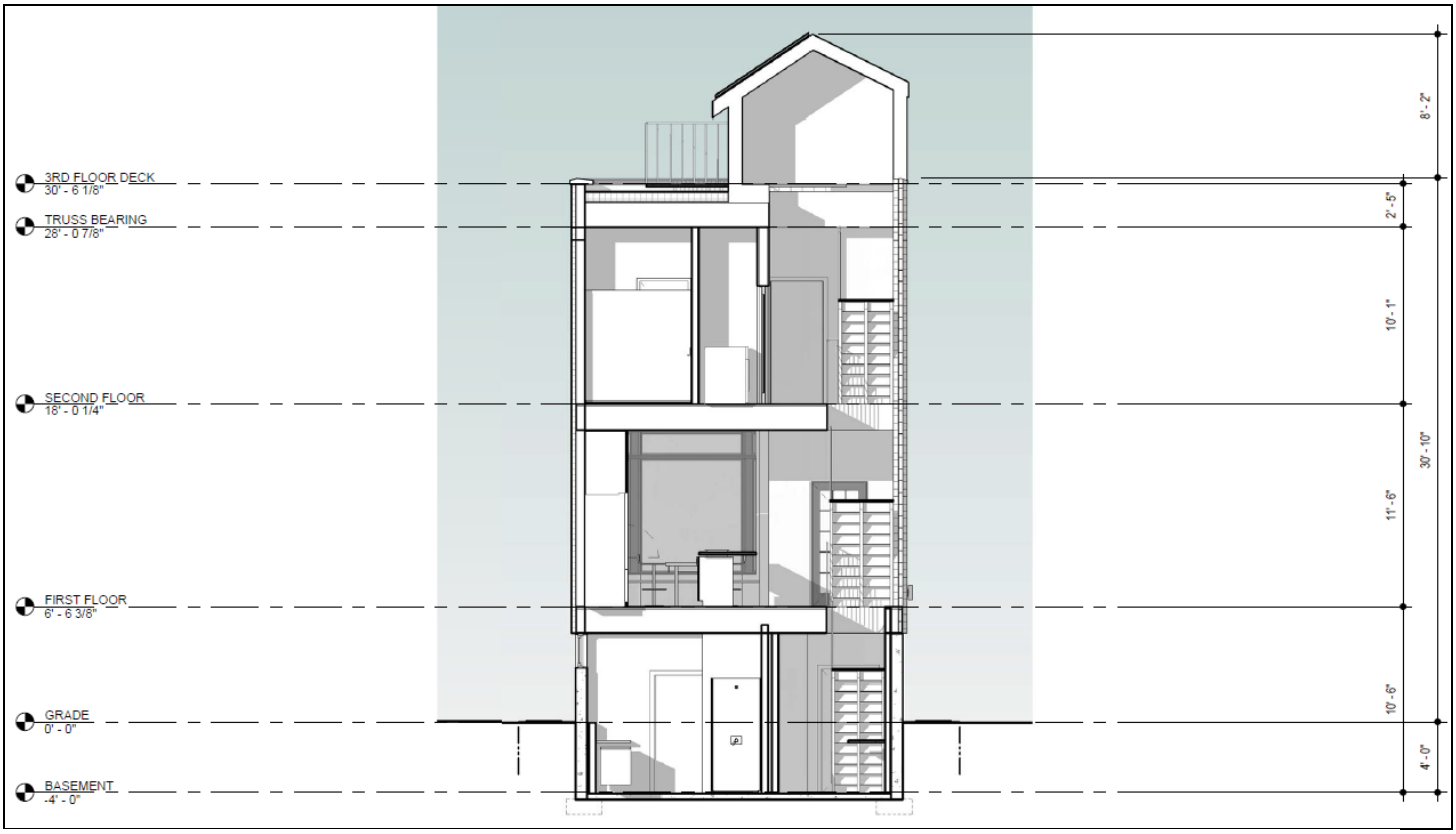
(19) Degree of complexity within the façade. *Early buildings are simple and straightforward. Queen Anne-style buildings are more complex in massing and detail but are not overly complex.*

(20) Orientation, vistas, overviews*. In general, buildings east of Rosa Parks Boulevard are oriented toward the east-west streets, with Trumbull Avenue, Eighth Street and Sixth Street being exceptions. Buildings west of Rosa Parks Boulevard are most often oriented toward the north-south streets. The general overview is that of small-scaled mixed-use neighborhood with major thoroughfares and major landmarks, such as Michigan Central Station and Most Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church surrounding the district.*

(21) Symmetric or asymmetric appearance. *Most buildings in the district are asymmetrical in appearance, but result in balanced compositions.*

(22) General environmental character*. The Corktown Historic District, with its narrow lots, shallow front yards, and small-scaled buildings, has a low-density, urban, mixed use character of a pre-automobile City. Its original cohesiveness has been eroded by housing demolition over the years.*

- Taking into account the Corktown Elements of Design and the strong architectural patterning of the adjacent 19th century houses, it is staff's opinion that the proposed design is not compatible at this location:
  Elements of Design – 1, 2, 3 and 6
  - Most residential houses are one-story to 2 ½ stories tall. With the raised basement and penthouse that leads to an open deck, the finished height of this dwelling is 39', which equates to a three-story house. The rectangular massing, coupled with the rooftop penthouse, creates an imposing structure in relation to the adjacent 1 ½ - and 2 ½-story dwellings.



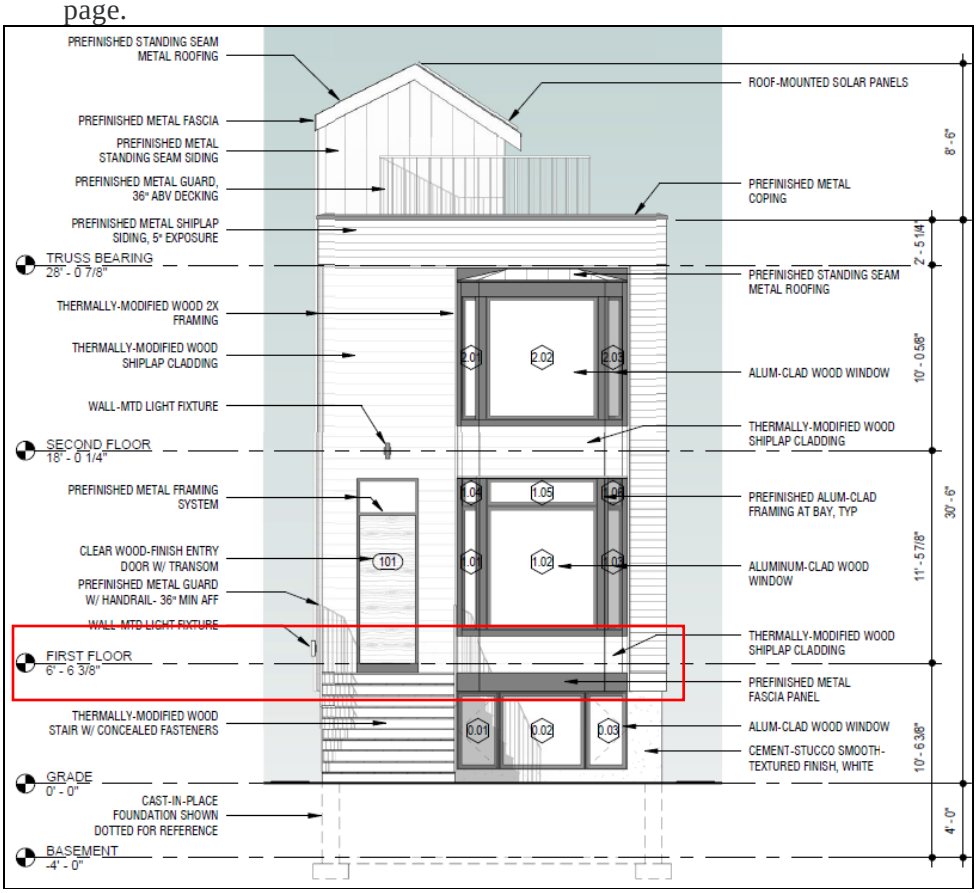
Applicant drawing – Building section. Comparing the height of each level (from floor to floor):

Basement	*14'-6"*	*First Floor*	*11'-6"*
Second Floor	*12'-6"*	*Penthouse*	*8'-2"*

- The dominant façade patterns of the historic houses on this block include front-facing gables (open and closed), bay windows, recessed entrances, covered porches and taller than wide windows. The proposed dwelling does nicely combine elements of the flanking bay windows (the two-story bay element at 2014 Wabash and the transom window within the façade window opening at 2006 Wabash). However, the remaining features on the historic houses are not referenced in any way, and the predominately flat-faced façade and flush front door further emphasizes the dwelling's verticality.

Applicant photo/rendering.

- The three historic houses all have raised basements, but the basement at 2014 Wabash is the tallest, allowing for large window openings. This creates a slightly higher first level floor height in contrast to the 1-½ story houses to the south. However, the top of the first floor bay window at 2014 Wabash is aligned with the top of the exceptionally large window at 2006 Wabash, minimizing the height different of the first floor.
- As shown below, the new dwelling's first floor exterior cladding of the bay window extends below the finished floor, thus creating visual alignment with the floor height of 2014 Wabash. However, the impact of the raised basement and increased ceiling heights of the interior rooms, causes the window openings to be out of alignment with the neighboring houses, as outlined in the photo at the bottom on the previous page.

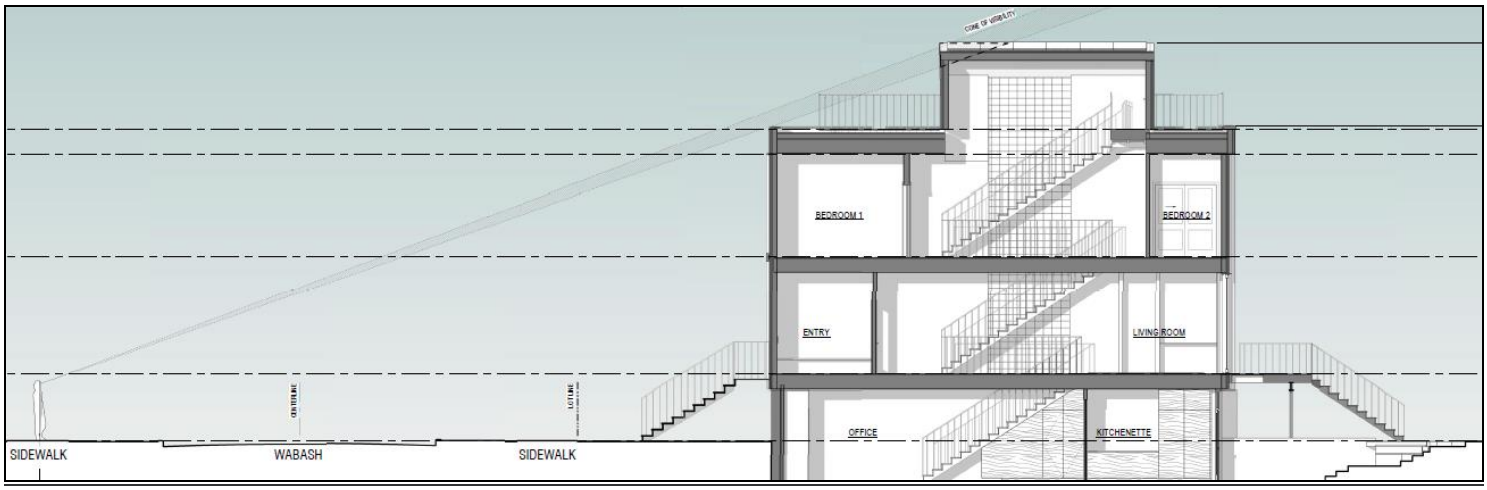


The applicant's dimensioned drawing shows how the exterior wall of the bay window extends below the interior's finished floor height, allowing for visual alignment with the first floor (and exterior porch floor) at 2014 Wabash.

Elements of Design – 11 and 15

- These elements discuss roof shapes and scale of façades and façade elements, by saying: *pitched roofs with frontal gables predominate in the district…* and *façade elements….are moderate in scale… Details within these elements are generally small in scale…*
- A tall flat roofed dwelling with an added gable-roofed penthouse creates an overall massing that is not compatible to the surrounding dominant front-gabled dwellings.
- Most of the residential structures erected within the last 10 years are strong contemporary expressions of residential architecture with minimally applied ornament. This proposal offers the same minimal level of ornament, however very few of the elements of design are integrated into the design so the dwelling is visually and physically disconcerting within this residential section of Wabash.
- The erection of a four-sided third floor/rooftop patio is an atypical feature in Corktown. It is staff's opinion the open-sided railing is in the spirit of the Victorian-age "widow's walk" which was a common design features for east coast homes.
- The required penthouse as an incompatible shape and massing for this residential street, and the patio railing creates an additional design element, all of which is in sharp contrast with the 19th century houses and in conflict with Standard 9 which states *"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"*. Staff will request additional visual studies from different angles/distances to determine how visible, or not, this third level patio and penthouse will be from a greater distance.

Photo: Massachusetts digital online collection.

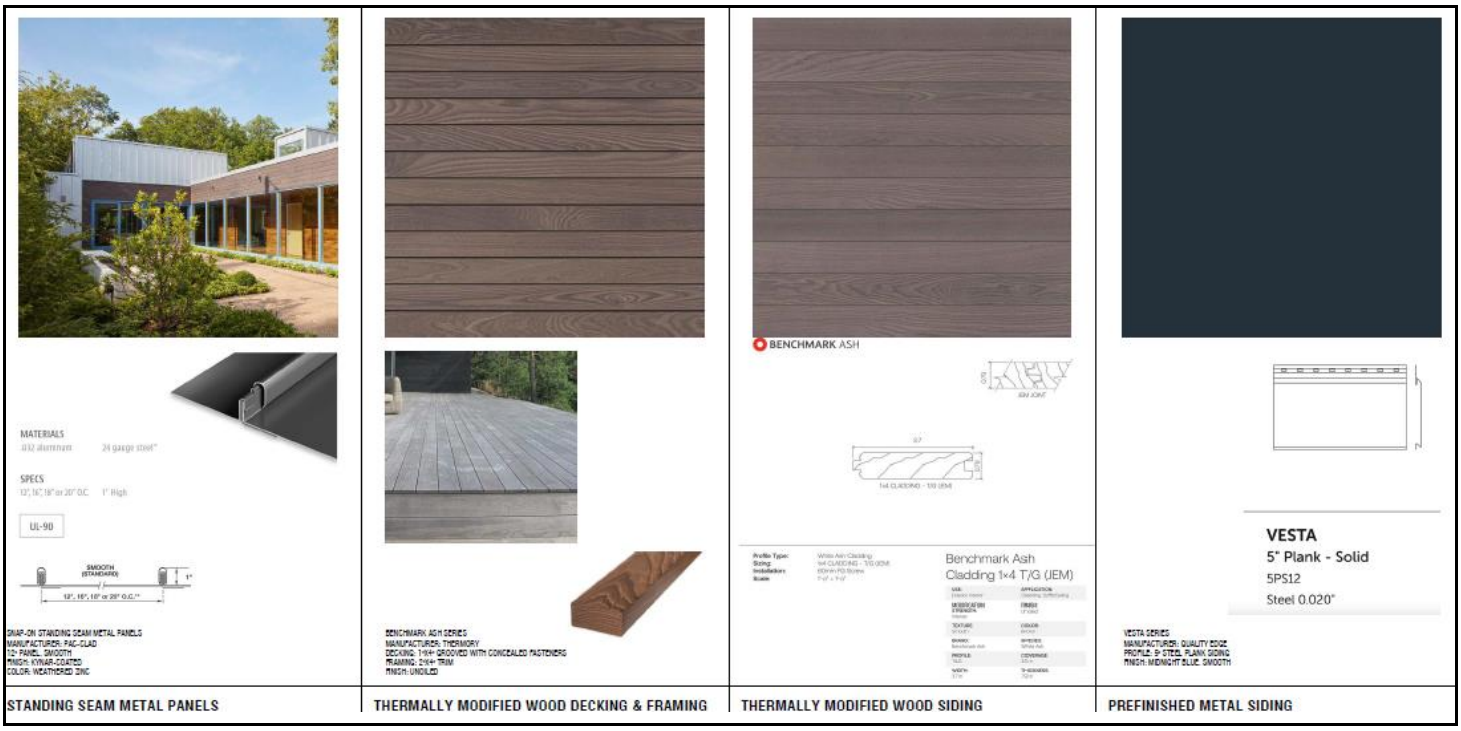


Above: Applicant visual study. Right: Detroit Parcel Viewer

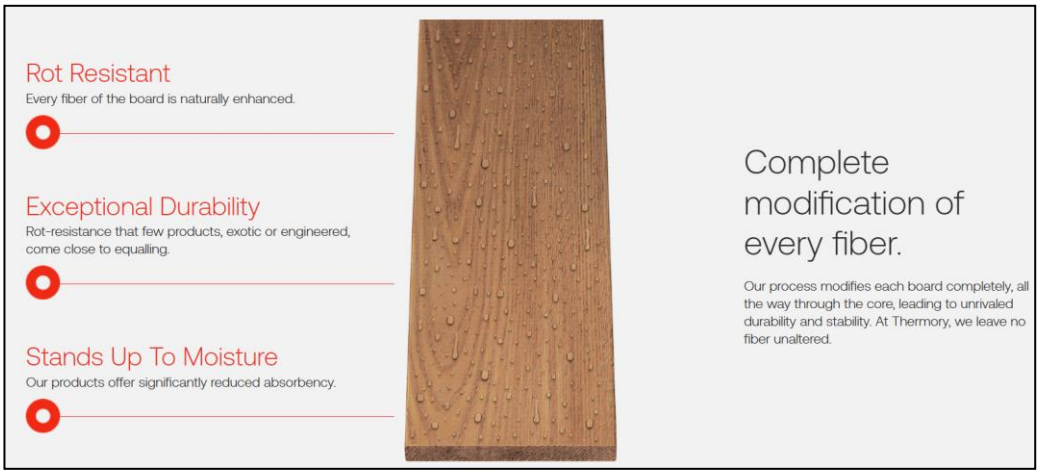
- The applicant supplied this visual study to show the portions of the rooftop patio railing and penthouse that will be visible from the west side of Wabash. Staff believes additional studies should be submitted for the Commission to understand how visible these elements will be from north, south and east views. The east view will be highly visible as Muliett Park is behind this lot.

Elements 7, 8, and 9

- These elements discuss the relationship of materials, textures and colors.
- Staff will refrain from discussing the materials selected for the structure until physical samples of each cladding material are submitted for review. Staff offers hesitation on the thermally-modified wood siding (product information on the following page), as the visual shown on the manufacturer's website has a defined wood grain pattern, which traditional wood siding does not. Staff also would like to see how the two different horizontal cladding materials work together as they will be adjacent each other on the front and rear walls, as well as the third cladding material (vertical prefinished metal standing seam) specified for the patio penthouse.
- ~~Staff was also notified by the applicant that the owners would like to install solar panels on the patio penthouse roof. Revised drawings were requested but have not been submitted, so staff cannot comment on this item.~~

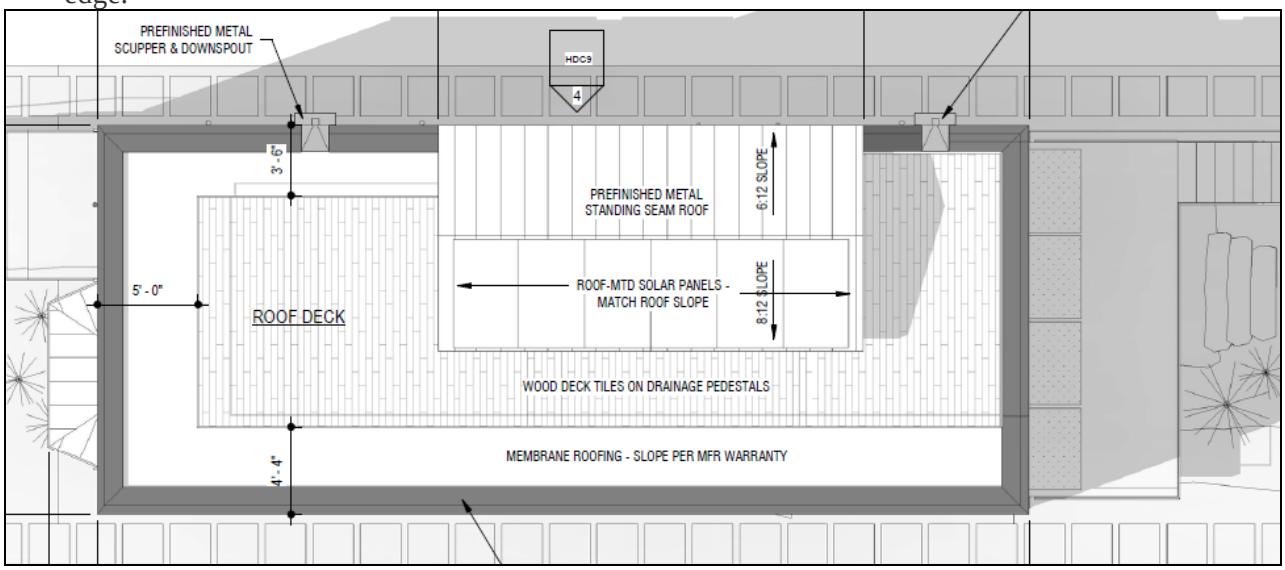


Excerpt from the applicant's materials page of the application.

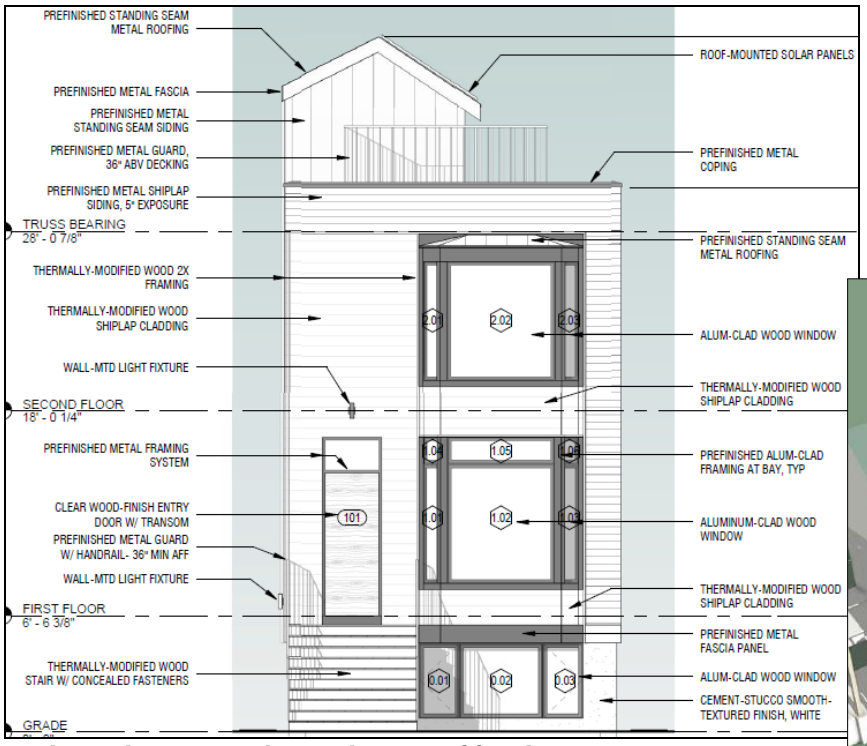


Photos and product information from Thermory's website.

- Solar panels are proposed for the third floor. The roof plan and elevation shows panels on the south-sloping roof, however the rendering shows an additional array on the flat roof, between the patio and roof edge.



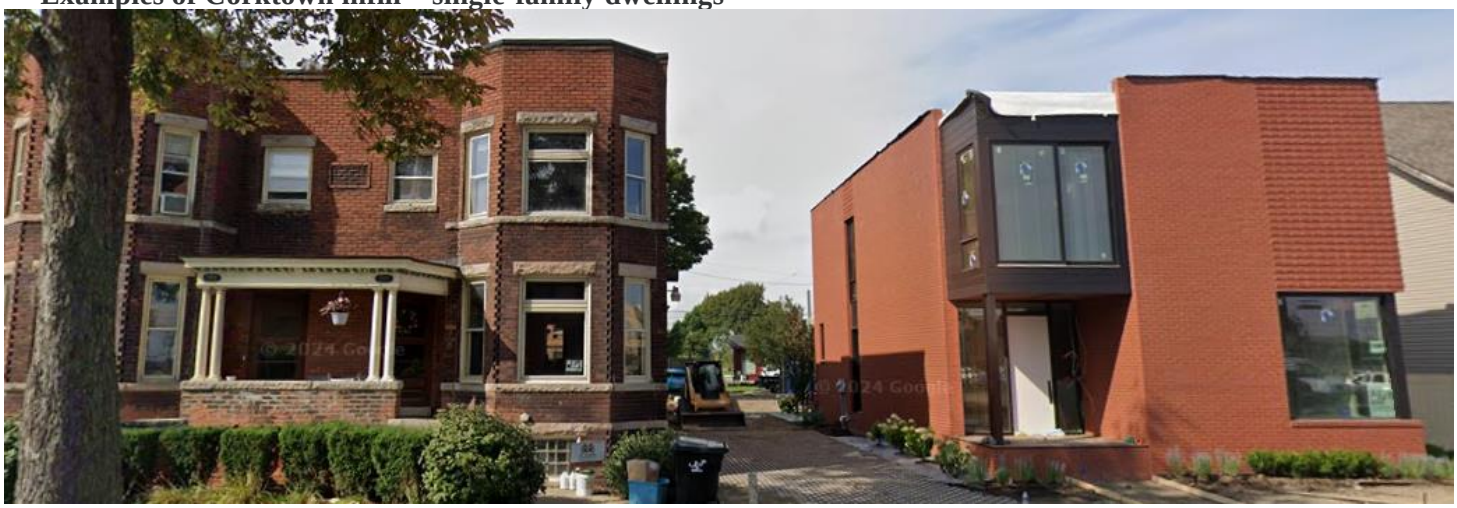
Applicant roof plan.



Applicant documents. Above: Elevation of façade.
Right: Rendering looking northeast from above.

Due to staff's concern with the proposed new dwelling, the following pages offer examples of new construction within Corktown that staff considers compatible with the district and neighboring properties.

Examples of Corktown infill – single-family dwellings

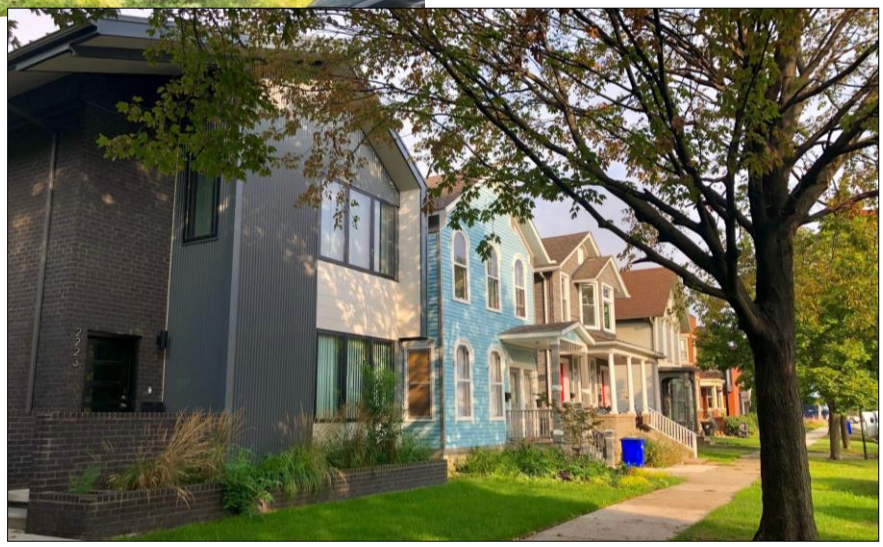


The two-story masonry dwelling at 2263 Wabash (right) was reviewed by the Commission in 2021. It is a distinctly contemporary building that fits within its surrounding historic context by its compatible massing, height, materials, textures, colors, window openings, façade expression and recessed entry/covered porch . The window openings are large, but offer a proportion similar to the adjacent two-family building. The textured brick is a subtle nod to the masonry pattern at the corners of the historic building's two-story bay windows. Google streetview, September 2023.

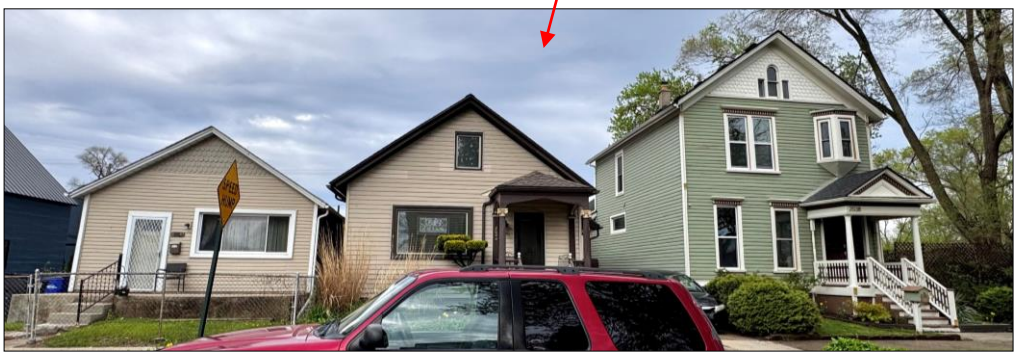
The single-family house at 2225 Wabash, erected in 2019, successfully fits into its environment due to its two-story massing, generally flush façade with front-facing open gable and matching roof pitch, overhanging smooth soffit, three window openings per floor, and covered front entry. The metal siding is sympathetic to the clapboard siding and minimally articulated walls of the adjacent historic house. The recessed wall where the front door is located appears to be a similar width as the historic covered porch and is a contrasting and proportional design for the front entry.

When looking down the street, the contemporary house retains its originality while harmonizing with the dominant historic house pattern on this block.

Staff photos, September, 2023.

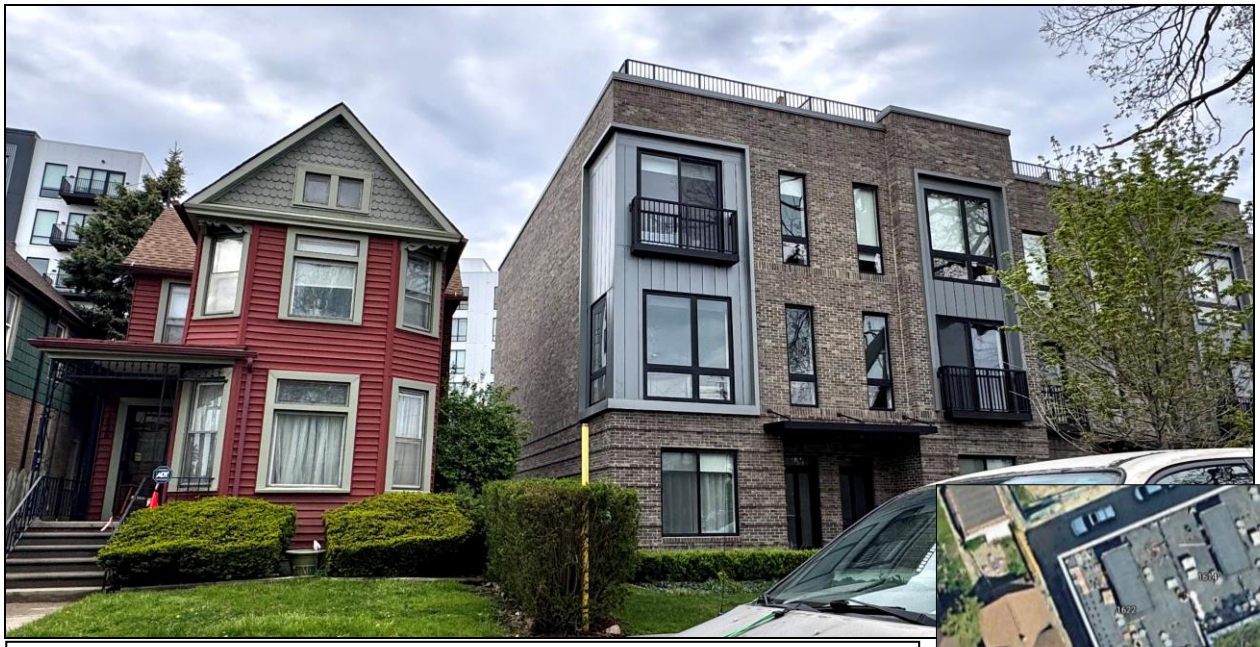


The dwelling at 2060 Wabash was erected 2015-2016. It is the most contemporary dwelling of the three examples. Its larger massing, tall roof ridge, and centrally placed vertical window opening offer a level of compatibility with the 2-1/2 story apartment building to its immediate left. The front-facing open gable with extending flat soffit, horizontal siding, and offset, recessed front door, is compatible with the one- and two-story houses to its right (see below).

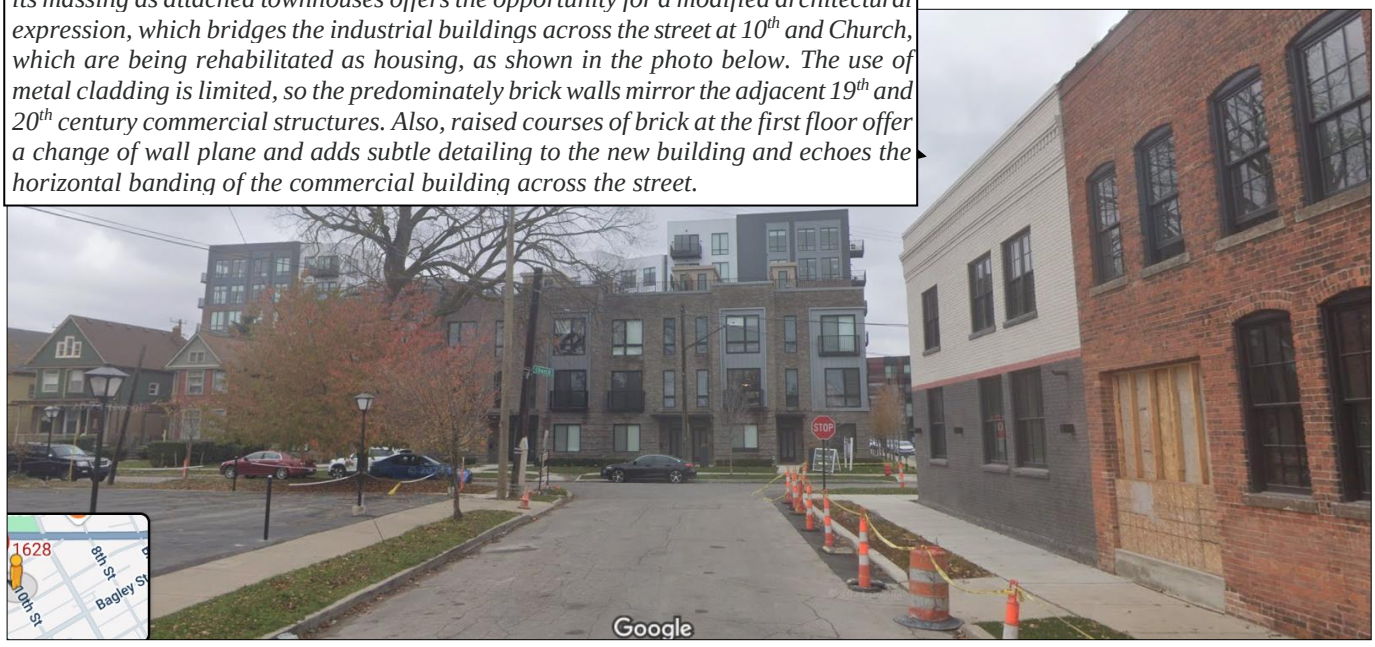


Examples of Corktown infill - multi-family/condominiums

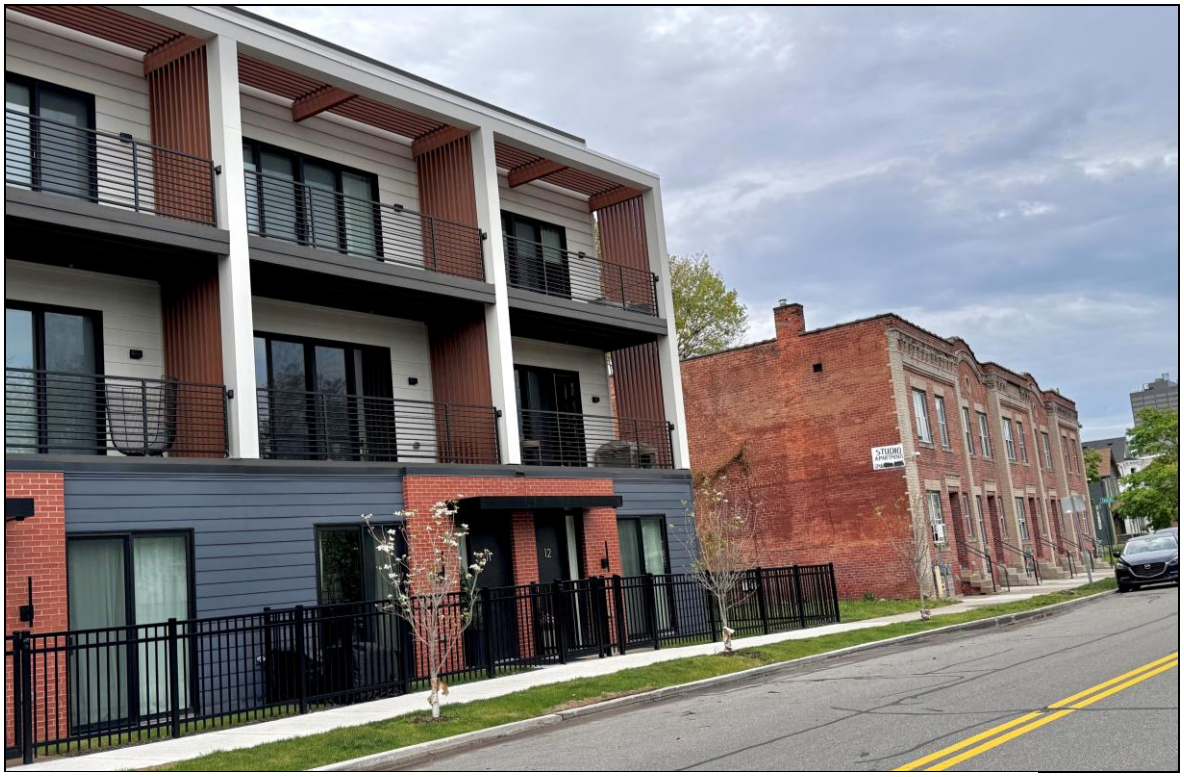
- Staff did not conduct an exhaustive review of all new construction projects in Corktown, but did look at a number of flat roofed projects as a comparison for this proposal. Of all the structures staff visited, only one was for a stand-alone single-family dwelling (and was discussed on page 9); the remaining are townhouses or condominiums.



New construction at 1606 - 1622 Church (property address is 1611 Michigan). The angle of the above photo is slightly misleading as it appears that the new building is not aligned with the 19th century house; however, its front wall is close to the position of the historic house, as seen in the aerial view at right. The new construction is three stories tall but offers a uniform flat roofed expression (including the penthouses), and its massing as attached townhouses offers the opportunity for a modified architectural expression, which bridges the industrial buildings across the street at 10th and Church, which are being rehabilitated as housing, as shown in the photo below. The use of metal cladding is limited, so the predominately brick walls mirror the adjacent 19th and 20th century commercial structures. Also, raised courses of brick at the first floor offer a change of wall plane and adds subtle detailing to the new building and echoes the horizontal banding of the commercial building across the street.

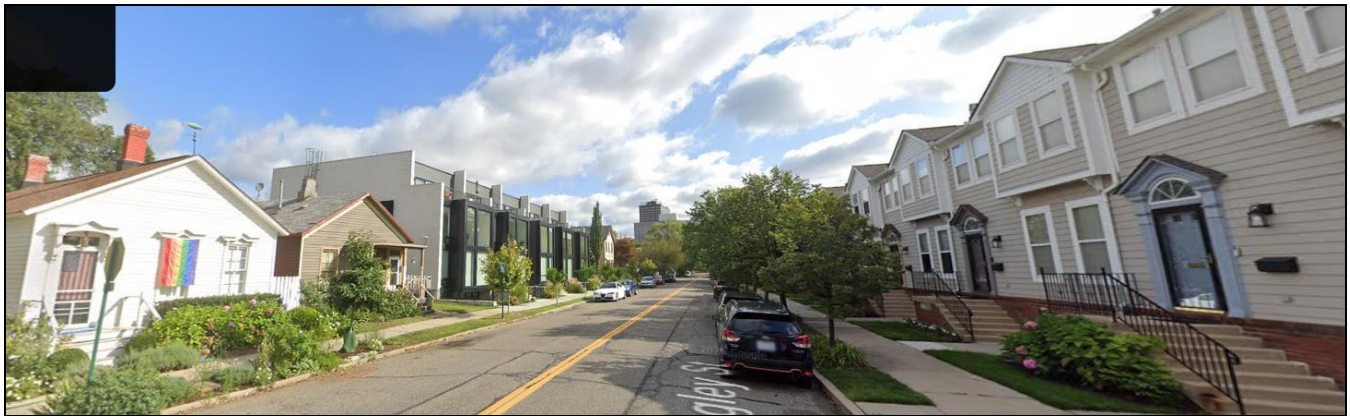


Top: Staff photo, May 2025. Middle and bottom: Aerial and streetview images, Google, 2024.



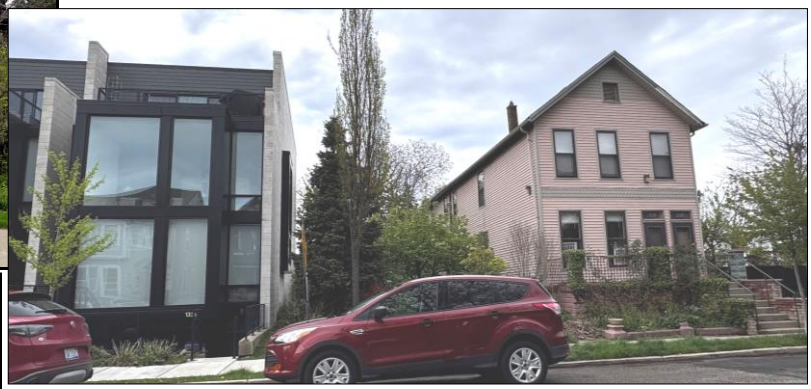
1640 – 1650 Bagley – condominium development adjacent to 1602 Bagley – apartment building.

This new construction is an interesting example as it compares similar massing/building types. But this comparison was added to show how some design elements of the historic building were adapted for the adjacent new construction making its design very site specific. The façade of the new structure reads as a flat fronted building due to the extended and contrasting colored porch enclosures at the second and third floor, and the off-white color echoes the design and pattern of the off-white brick on the historic structure. Red brick was used at the ganged condo entrances; the flat roofed overhang is the inverse to the recessed entries of the historic building.



1336 – 1354 Bagley – condominium development. It is located between 19th century dwellings and across the street from a multi-family development that was erected in 1997. The height of the condominiums are not out of scale with the buildings on the south side of Church, where the ridge of the gabled roof is similar in height to the townhouses.

These one-story vernacular houses are at the west end of the new development. The condos have three floors, but the third floor is recessed from the street (with a repeating flat roof) which minimizes the visibility of the upper porch railings so the dominant, and mostly transparent façade walls, read as a two-floor structure. The basement is accessible from the street by stairs leading to a lower patio; this allows the first floor to be only slightly above grade and in alignment with the adjacent historic dwellings. The entrances are recessed, which offers a similar secondary effect (i.e., letting the building read as the dominant element) as the adjacent historic house whose entry door is accessed by a covered porch, which extends forward from the primary wall.



This is the east end of the condominium development. The new building's roof line remains at, or under, the ridge of the two-story historic house (which is a bit taller due to its slightly raised basement). The mostly transparent façade of the contemporary building subdues its modern and unornamented design, allowing the textured walls of the 19th century houses to remain a dominant architectural expression on the north side of the street.
Staff photos, May 2025.

ISSUES

- The residential houses adjacent this property are 1 ½ and 2 ½ stories tall but the proposed finish height of the new dwelling is taller than the adjacent house and is 39'.
- The erection of a four-sided third floor/rooftop patio is an uncommon feature in Corktown. The required penthouse as an incompatible shape and massing for this residential street, and the patio railing creates an additional design element, all of which is in sharp contrast with the 19th century houses and in conflict with Standard 9 which states *"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"*. Additional visual studies from different angles/distances to determine how visible, or not, this third level patio and penthouse will be from a greater distance should be submitted for consideration.
- The dominant façade patterns of the historic houses on this block include front-facing gables (open and closed), bay windows, recessed entrances, covered porches and taller than wide windows. The proposed dwelling does nicely combine elements of the flanking bay windows (the two-story bay at 2014 Wabash and the subdivided bay window openings at 2006 Wabash). However, the remaining features on the historic houses are not referenced in any way, and the predominately flat-faced façade further emphasizes the dwelling's verticality
- The floor heights and window openings of the first and second floor are out of alignment with the neighboring houses.
- This proposal offers a minimal level of ornament typical for contemporary buildings, however very few of the elements of design are integrated into the proposal so the dwelling is visually and physically disconcerting within this residential section of Wabash.
- Material samples for all exterior surfaces must be submitted for review. It is not clear how the three wall cladding materials will work together, as well understanding the materiality and finish of thermally-modified wood siding.
- As per the National Park Service guidance regarding solar panels, "an installation that negatively impacts the historic character of a property will not meet the Standards." However, the National Park Service does allow for the installation of solar panels which are "minimally visible."
- As this dwelling is new construction, there are no historic compatibility issues in relation to the dwelling itself and the proposed installation. However, HDC staff has evaluated the proposal within the context of/has defined the historic "property" to include 2012 Wabash AND the historic district/adjacent historic homes.
- The proposed new solar arrays will likely be visible from Marentette and Vermont streets, and possibly Wabash when walking/driving north from Marentette and Bagley streets.
- It is HDC staff's opinion that this array is not compatible with the historic appearance of the adjacent/nearby historic homes within the district.

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Corktown Historic District's Elements of Design, specifically:

- *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.*
- *Elements of Design 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 15.*

For the following reasons;

- The residential houses adjacent this property are 1 ½ and 2 ½ stories tall but the proposed finish height of the new dwelling is taller than the adjacent house and is close to 35'.
- The erection of a four-sided third floor/rooftop patio is an uncommon feature in Corktown. The required penthouse as an incompatible shape and massing for this residential street, and the patio railing creates an additional design element, all of which is in sharp contrast with the 19th century houses and in conflict with

Standard 9 which states *"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"*. Staff will request additional visual studies from different angles/distances to determine how visible, or not, this third level patio and penthouse will be from a greater distance.

- The dominant façade patterns of the historic houses on this block include front-facing gables (open and closed), bay windows, recessed entrances, covered porches and taller than wide windows. The proposed dwelling does nicely combine elements of the flanking bay windows (the two-story bay at 2014 Wabash and the subdivided bay window openings at 2006 Wabash). However, the remaining features on the historic houses are not referenced in any way, and the predominately flat-faced façade further emphasizes the dwelling's verticality
- The floor heights and window openings of the first and second floor are out of alignment with the neighboring houses.
- This proposal offers a minimal level of ornament typical for contemporary buildings, however very few of the elements of design are integrated into the proposal so the dwelling is visually and physically disconcerting within this residential section of Wabash.
- Material samples for all exterior surfaces must be submitted for review. It is not clear how the three wall cladding materials will work together, as well understanding the materiality and finish of thermally-modified wood siding.
- As per the National Park Service guidance regarding solar panels, "an installation that negatively impacts the historic character of a property will not meet the Standards." The proposed new solar arrays will likely be visible from Marentette and Vermont streets, and possibly Wabash when walking/driving north from Marentette and Bagley streets; the array is not compatible with the historic appearance of the adjacent/nearby historic homes within the district.