

STAFF REPORT: 05/14/2025 MEETING

PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

ADDRESS: 4700 THIRD AVENUE

APPLICATION NO: HDC2025-00112

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WARREN-PRENTIS

APPLICANT: ALEXANDRA SAWA

OWNER: MIDTOWN CENTER GROUP LLC

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 4/25/2025

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 4/21/2025

SCOPE: REPLACE STOREFRONT AND CLADDING (WORK COMPLETED WITHOUT APPROVAL)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The property at 4700 Third Avenue is a one-story commercial building that was erected in 1921. The building houses two spaces, one which is located at its southeast corner and one located at its northwest end. The roof is flat and storefronts are aluminum. The building's brick and limestone exterior cladding was installed recently.



4700 Third Avenue, current appearance. The yellow arrow indicates the storefront that is the subject of the current application. Photo taken by staff on 4/25/2025



4700 Third Avenue, current appearance of the storefront that is the subject of the current application (outlined in red). Photo taken by staff on 4/25/2025



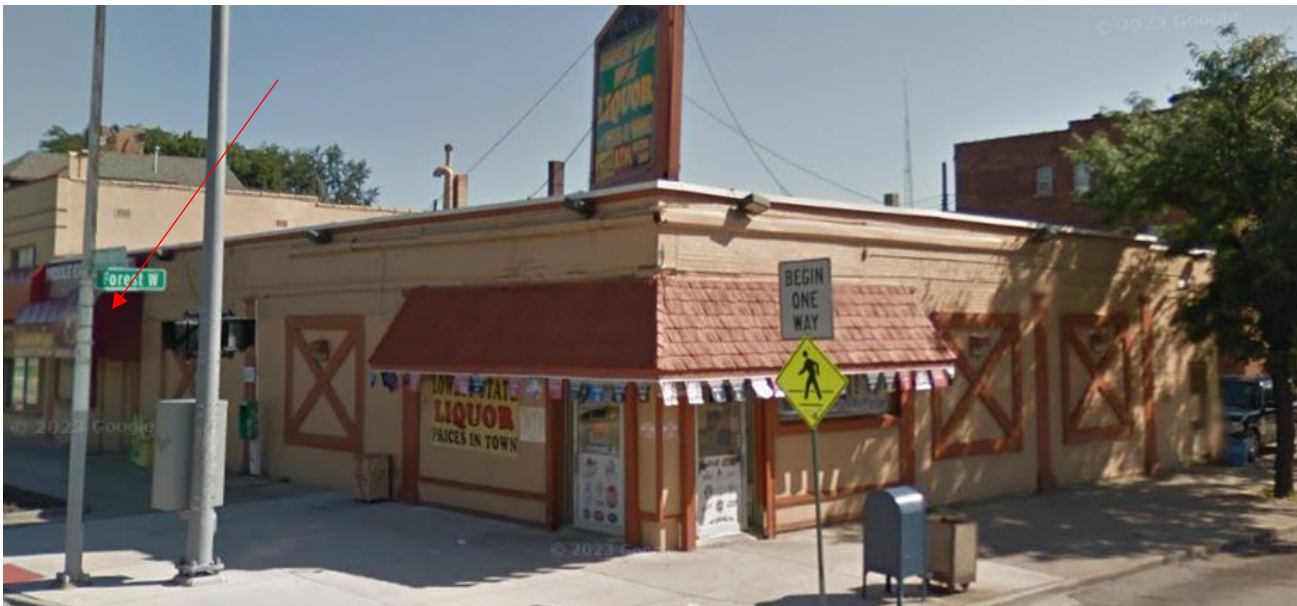
4700 Third Avenue outlined in yellow. Detroit Parcel Viewer

PROPOSAL

Recently the building was reclad with grey brick and a new aluminum storefront was installed without Historic District Commission approval. Therefore, with the current submission, the applicant is seeking the Commission's "after-the-fact" approval of the work. The current application also is seeking the Commission's approval to install a new sign and paint the existing grey brick (which was installed without HDC approval) yellow and white.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Warren-Prentiss Historic District was designated in 2001
- The building's exterior has undergone several alterations since designation, to include the following:
 - In 2016, the storefront and wall at the building's southwest corner was damaged by a car and required extensive repairs. HDC staff therefore issued a COA for the installation of a new door and masonry cladding at the area of damage (see the below Google Streetview images)
 - In 2018, HDC staff issued a COA to replace failing brick and limestone at the 3rd Avenue façade with new to match existing adjacent
 - In 2019, HDC staff issued a COA to replace failing brick and limestone at the Forest Avenue façade with new to match existing adjacent
 - In 2022, a rehabilitation of the exterior cladding was undertaken outside of design that was approved in 2019, to include the replacement of the original pilasters with rusticated pilasters and the installation of a new aluminum storefront. The owner therefore submitted an application to the Commission for an "after-the-fact" approval of the work. The Commission denied the rusticated pilasters, but approved the new brickwork and aluminum storefronts
 - In 2022, HDC staff issued a COA for the replacement of the unapproved, rusticated pilasters with new limestone pilasters to resemble the original pilasters which were removed.
 - Note that none of the above-listed work items impacted the storefront that is subject to the current application.



4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image taken in 2015. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project



4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image taken in 2013. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project



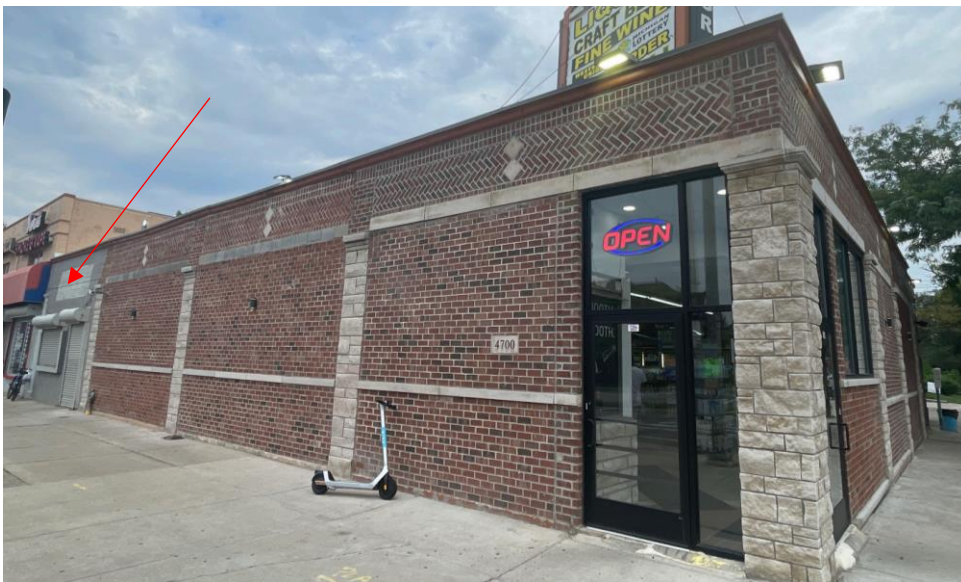
4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image taken in 2016, after a car damaged the facade. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project



4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image taken in 2018, after approved exterior work was completed to repair damage caused by car accident. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project



4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image taken in 2021. Note that new brick has been added at the 3rd Street façade, while the Forest Avenue façade remains intact. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project. Note that the neither the cladding nor fenestration has changed since 2015. However, the non-historic awning has been removed and the wall has been painted grey.



4700 Third Street. Staff photo taken in 2022 after unapproved installation of rusticated limestone pilasters and new aluminum storefronts. The Commission denied the rusticated pilasters, but approved the new brickwork and aluminum storefronts. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project. Note that the original brick cladding and limestone pilaster remained at that time.



4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image taken in 2023 after the installation of staff approved pilasters to replace inappropriate rusticated limestone elements. Red arrow indicates location of storefront involved in the current project.



4700 Third Street. Google Streetview image of the area of the building involved in the current project taken in 2023 after the installation of staff approved pilasters to replace inappropriate rusticated limestone elements. Note the herringbone pattern at the parapet, the limestone band below the parapet, the remaining limestone pilaster, and the brick pattern.

- On 10/20/2024, the Detroit Building Department issued a permit to the property owner (BLD2024-01878) to rehabilitate the storefront which is the subject of the current application. Specifically, the permit drawings proposed the following:
 - Replace existing window and door with a new aluminum storefront
 - Retain existing brick directly above new storefront
 - Install new exterior insulation finishing system (EIFS) cladding directly below existing brick parapet
 - Paint walls

However, please note that a review of BSEED records indicates that the permit ***was never submitted to the Historic District Commission staff for review and approval and was therefore issued in error***

- In April 2025, HDC staff received the current application for new signage which revealed that a rehabilitation of the building had been completed, to include the installation of new grey brick cladding and a new aluminum storefront. As staff determined that the exterior had not been approved by the Commission, the project was docketed to the May 2025 regular meeting docket. See the below photos, which show current conditions.



4700 Third Street. Staff photo taken on 4/25/2025 showing current conditions after unapproved brick replacement and storefront installation proposed for approval with the current application (see red arrow). Note incongruous appearance with the rest of the building/façade.



4700 Third Street. Photo from applicant showing current conditions after unapproved brick replacement and storefront installation proposed for approval with the current application (see red arrow). Note all original herringbone pattern at parapet and the limestone band which was below the parapet is no longer present. It appears that the only original portion of the cladding that remains is the limestone pilaster to the left of the new aluminum storefront.

- As noted above, between 2016 and 2022, the building received a number of COAs for a number of exterior repairs which were undertaken to address damage caused by a car crash and delayed maintenance. Although this work resulted in the replacement of much of the building's original exterior cladding, all COAs were issued because the proposed work was undertaken in a manner which was in keeping with the building's historic character/closely resembled the original cladding as required by the Standards.
- The current application does not include documentation that the brick cladding that was replaced was deteriorated beyond repair. Also, the current grey brick is not appropriate to the building's historic character as it does not match the existing or the original in texture, dimension, bond, or color. The herringbone pattern/design which once existed at the parapet and the limestone band below the parapet were not repeated with the current recladding. As a result of this unapproved work, the current storefront appears incongruous with the remaining portions of the building's front and side facades. The work therefore does not meet the Standards. Staff also notes that the EIFS cladding proposed in the building permit drawings is also an inappropriate cladding because it is not an adequate replication of the brick which was removed without HDC approval. It is HDC staff's opinion that brick and limestone which matches that which exists at the adjacent walls should be installed to replace the existing grey brick. Staff further recommends that this brick not be painted per the proposal so that presents an appearance that is consistent with the adjacent facade.
- Staff is generally in support of the proposed new sign as it appears to be consistent with the existing signage at the building's 3rd Street façade in terms of material, size/scale, and proposed location. However, staff would only recommend its approval if the current cladding was replaced with a new cladding that better approximates the appearance of the historic brick and limestone that was removed from the façade without HDC approval.

ISSUES

- The current application does not include documentation that the brick cladding that was removed without approval was deteriorated beyond repair
- Neither the current grey brick cladding that was installed without approval nor the EIFS cladding proposed in the building permit set (unapproved by the HDC) provides an adequate replication of the original brick cladding that was removed without COA.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 2, Denial: Install new cladding and paint

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

- 2.) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided*
- 5.) Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.*
- 6.) Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall*

match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical, or pictorial evidence.

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.

For the following reasons:

- The current application does not include documentation that the brick cladding that was replaced was deteriorated beyond repair.
- The current grey brick that was installed without approval is not appropriate to the building's historic character as it not an adequate not match of the original in texture, dimension, bond, or color. Also, the herringbone pattern/design and limestone band below which once existed at the parapet was not repeated with the current recladding. As a result, the current storefront appears incongruous with the remaining portions of the building's front and side facades
- The EIFS proposed in the building permit drawings is also an inappropriate cladding because it is not an adequate replication of the brick which was removed without HDC approval.
- Painting the entirety of new brick at the storefront will obscure the brick's character

Recommendation 2 of 2, Certificate of Appropriateness: Install a new sign

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

- The current cladding shall be replaced with a new cladding that better approximates the appearance of the historic brick and limestone that was removed from the façade without HDC approval. Staff shall be afforded the opportunity to review and approve the final cladding proposal prior to the issuance of the permit for the new signage.