

ADDRESS: 709-729 SEWARD**APPLICATION NO: HDC2025-00183****HISTORIC DISTRICT: NEW CENTER AREA****APPLICANT: GARRITY GUENTHER LANGS****OWNER: 700 SEWARD DETROIT, LLC****DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 4/25/2025****DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 4/21/2025****SCOPE: DEMOLISH BUILDING; CONSTRUCT PARKING LOT****EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The project area includes three contiguous parcels which are located in the 700 block of Seward Street, in the New Center Area Historic District, to include 709, 719, and 729 Seward. The easternmost of the three subject parcels, 709 Seward, includes a single-family house that was erected ca. 1900. The building features a central, two-story, hipped roof mass with a projecting, gabled-roof wing. Exterior walls are clad with brick at the first story. Wood shake and wood clapboard are found at the building's second story. Windows appear to be the original wood units. A partial width, flat-roof porch with non-historic metal columns is at the front façade. The parcel includes an open front yard, a narrow side yard to the east of the house and a small grassy rear yard with a concrete parking area beyond. The parcel addressed as 719 Seward includes a concrete parking lot, which is accessed via a curb cut onto Seward Street. The parcel at 729 Seward includes a 2½-story single-family residence which was constructed ca. 1907. The structure is clad in red brick which is also painted red in color and features limestone and wood details as well as cedar shake. The asymmetrical façade includes a two-story bay at the right side of the elevation and a raised covered porch at the left side of the elevation which includes the main entrance to the house. The wood double-hung windows are intact. The multi-gabled roof is covered in reddish-brown asphalt shingles and features three dormers (2 at the front elevation and one at the rear elevation). The property includes a parking lot directly to the side/east of and rear/south of the house. A 6'-0"-tall, metal chain-link fence, erected sometime in 2016 without HDC approval, is located at the northern property line/perimeter of all three parcels.



709 Seward, facing south. Photo taken by staff 5/30/2025. The current application proposes to demolish this house



711 Seward, facing southeast showing parking area between the houses at 709 and 729 Seward. Photo taken 5/30/2025 by HDC staff



729 Seward, facing south. Photo taken by HDC staff on 5/30/2025. The current application proposes to retain this house and add new paving build a parking lot which will extend into the property's rear yard area



709-729 Seward, facing southeast showing all three parcels targeted by the current application. Photo taken by HDC staff on 5/30/2025

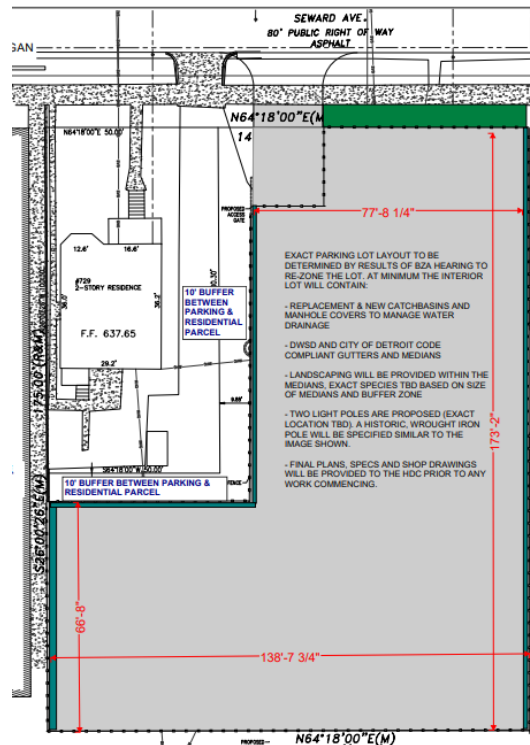
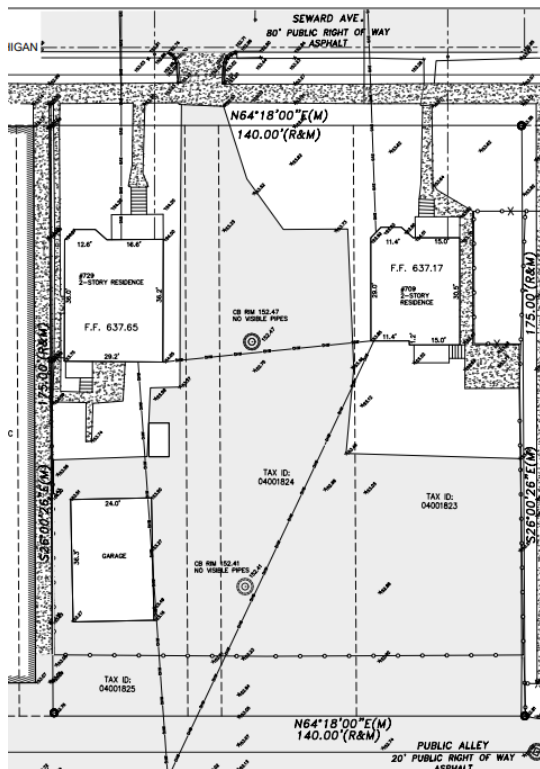


709-729 Seward, outlined in red. Detroit Parcel Viewer

PROPOSAL

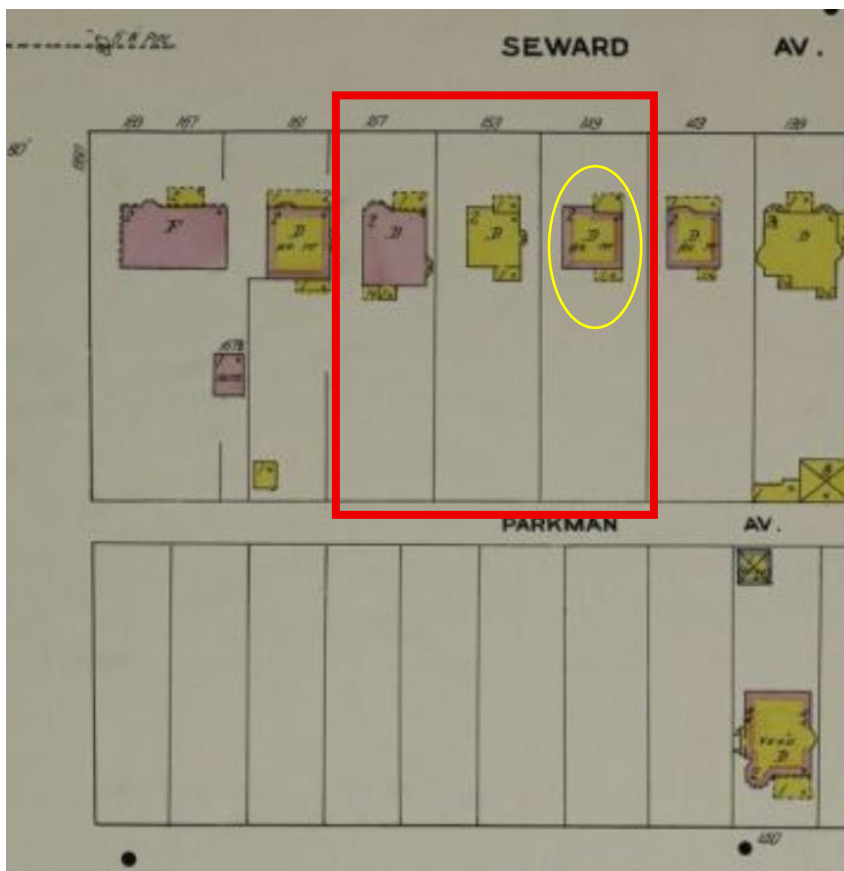
With the current proposal, the applicant is seeking the Commission's approval for the following, per the submitted documents:

- Demolish the house located at 709 Seward
- Establish a new concrete parking lot at 709-729 Seward, to include the addition of a new curbcut at 711 Seward.
- Enclose the new parking lot with a 6'-0" metal gate



STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The New Center Area Historic District was established in 1982
- The HDAB designation report notes that the district includes "... representative samples of residential architecture spanning the years 1895 through 1930" and "...attractive, medium height apartment buildings erected between 1914 and the early 1940s."
- Element of Design #22 *General Environmental Character*, states that "the character of the New Center Historic District is that of late 19th Century and early 20th Century residences on straight east-west streets."
- The building proposed for demolition/709 Seward was erected ca. 1900, during the time span referenced in the district's designation report and Elements of Design. The building displays a high level of integrity as it retains its original windows, siding, overall form, and front porch roof. It is therefore staff's opinion that the building is a contributing historic resource within the district. See the below photos of the building to note its appearance at the time of the district's designation as well as its current appearance/condition.



1910 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Area outlined in red indicates parcels included in the current proposal. The building outlined in yellow, addressed as 159 Seward (current address is 709 Seward), is targeted for demolition in the current application.



1970 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Area outlined in red indicates parcels included in the current proposal. The building outlined in yellow is targeted for demolition in the current application.



Building's appearance in 1982, at the time of the district's designation. Photo by HDAB



Current appearance. Photo by applicant



Current appearance. Photo by applicant



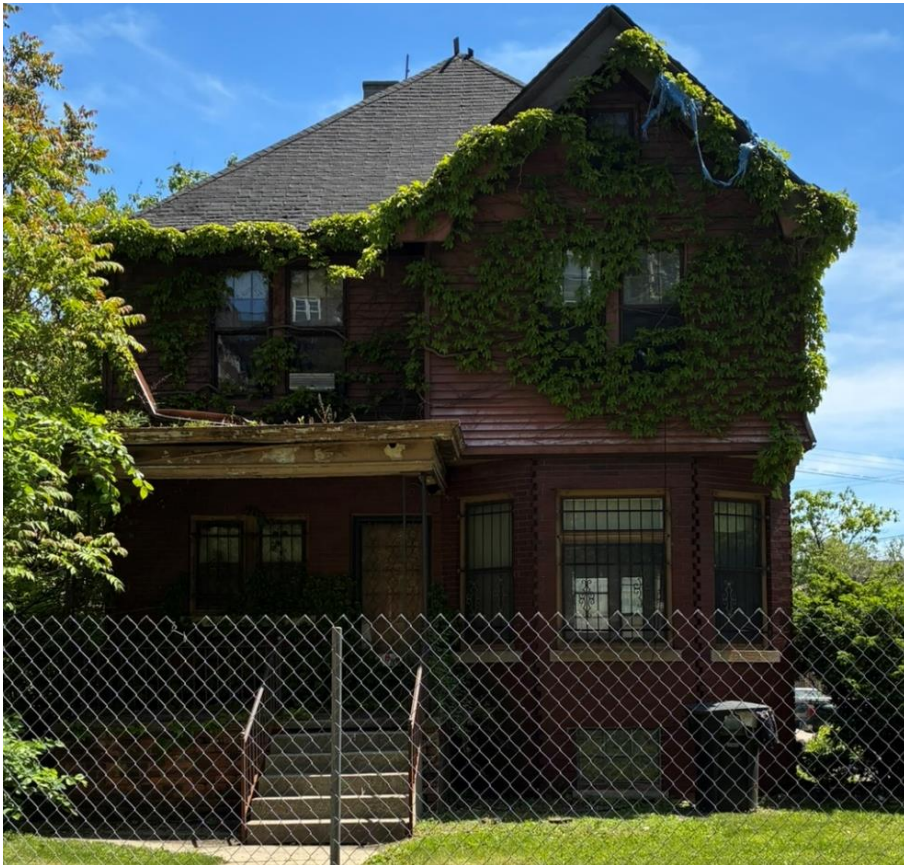
Current appearance. Photo by applicant



Current appearance. Photo by applicant



Current appearance. Photo by staff, taken 5/30/2025



Current appearance. Photo by staff, taken 5/30/2025

- The applicant has noted that they are seeking to demolish the building at 709 Seward because “...it is estimated that the rehabilitation of 709 Seward would cost \$250,000 - \$325,000 based on the total cost-at-completion of the rehabilitation of 729 Seward, a property of the same size and original era of construction. 700 Seward Detroit LLC is seeking approval to demolish the structure at 709 Seward due to the overwhelming cost of construction compared to the economic value of the property at completion.”
- Staff visited the site and assessed the exterior photos submitted with the current application and concluded the house was in repairable condition with no visible catastrophic deficiencies noted. Specifically, the house appears to be in no worse condition/repair than many of the vacant buildings located within the City’s historic districts. Staff did request that the applicant supply additional photos to better highlight existing conditions. However, staff has yet to receive such photos as of the date of this report’s completion.
- Staff notes that research undertaken for this report revealed that the properties targeted by the current project appear to have an historic association with an organization called “The Black Slate,” which served as the political arm for the Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church. The Shrine of the Black Madonna of the Pan African Orthodox Christian Church, located at 7625 Linwood Street, was recently listed in the National Register of Historic Places due to its historic significance as a center of the civil rights movement in Detroit during the 1960s. Per the organization’s website, the Black Slate was founded under the guidance the church leadership “...for the purpose of aiding qualified candidates’ bids for elective office. To this end, The Black Slate has been a cogent force in establishing and elevating capable, caring and conscientious individuals in the political arena....The Black Slate had its debut in the 1973 Detroit Mayoral Election...Hundreds of Black Slate volunteers were deployed throughout the city to register voters and to educate and motivate the Black community to vote one of our own into the mayor’s office. History was made as The Black Slate army worked the polls and Coleman Alexander Young became Detroit’s first Black mayor.” Staff notes that the Contributing status of the extant buildings within the current project area is solely tied to their importance as residential resources within the district’s identified early 20th century period of significance. However, staff does assess that the properties might have other important historic associations within the context of the civil rights movement/ethnic history at a local level and will therefore forward the above noted information to the Historic Designation Advisory Board for consideration if future efforts are undertaken to update the district’s period of significance and/or expand upon its historic context.
- It is staff’s opinion that it is both reasonable and feasible to rehabilitate the building proposed for demolition. Therefore, the demolition of this contributing historic resource does not meet the Standards. Also, replacement of the building with paved area/hardscape to this district is not in keeping with the district’s general environmental character, per Element of Design #22, which states the following:
 - *The character of the New Center Historic District is that of late 19th Century and early 20th Century residences on straight east-west streets. A cohesiveness is attained by entrance gates, uniform setbacks, spacing on lots, buried utilities, and, on Pallister, spacious tree lawns, street furniture, and brick paving. Overall, the district has an urban, low to moderate density, revitalized residential character with small-scale commercial usage on its southern periphery and on Second from Virginia Park to Delaware.*

ISSUES

- The contributing historic building proposed for demolition retains its historic integrity is not deteriorated beyond repair.
- The replacement of a building for new paved parking is not in keeping with the district's general environmental character. The project therefore does not meet the Standards, nor does it conform to the district's Elements of Design

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial: Demolish building; construct a parking lot

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the New Center Area 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.

10). New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

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Element of Design #22

For the following reasons:

- The contributing historic building proposed for demolition retains its historic integrity is not deteriorated beyond repair.
- The replacement of a building for new paved parking is not in keeping with the district's general environmental character. The project therefore does not meet the Standards, nor does it conform to the district's Elements of Design