

STAFF REPORT: 8/13/2025 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00427

ADDRESS: 1950 TRUMBULL

HISTORIC DISTRICT: CORKTOWN

APPLICANT: EMILY PREHODA, SOLAR FAITHFUL

PROPERTY OWNER: ST PETER'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 07/11/2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 7/29/2025

SCOPE: INSTALL 33 SOLAR PANELS ON ROOFS ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE BUILDING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This Gothic Revival church building was designed by architects Harold Ellington and William C. Weston (Weston and Ellington) and was, according to historicdetroit.org, built in phases in the 1920s. The church is located at the southeast corner of Trumbull and Church Street, just south of Michigan Avenue. The church is built of brick with stone accents and the main volume (sanctuary) is tall with a gable end (west end of the building) facing Trumbull and a large stained-glass window with stone tracery and two alcoves for stone statues. This main volume has buttresses flanking it on the north and south sides. The spaces between the buttresses are roofed with shed roofs, creating one-story passages on both sides of the sanctuary. At the rear of the church (east end of the building) is a slightly shorter, gable-ended addition, along with an addition with a flat roof to the south. To the north and toward the rear of the sanctuary is a more modestly scaled brick and stone Parish House with a flat roof. On that roof, there is an existing solar array, but it can't be seen from the street. To the church's south is a surface parking lot.



Site visit photo 1, staff. St Peter's Episcopal Church, west façade facing Trumbull. The sanctuary is the tall, center portion, and the buttresses flanking the sanctuary are visible on both the north and south sides. The Parish Hall is just visible to the left and to the rear (near the sanctuary's northeast corner). The driveway is visible in this picture, just right (south) of the church, and the parking lot is further south and not pictured. (July 2025)



Site visit, photo 2, staff. St Peter's Episcopal Church, Parish House visible to the left (north) of the sanctuary. (July 2025)



Site visit, photo 3, staff. South side of St Peter's Episcopal Church from south on Trumbull traveling north. Partial surface lot also shown. The Church's south side has high visibility from Trumbull for a long distance. (July 2025)

PROPOSAL

Proposed is the installation of 33 roof-mounted solar panels, including 15 solar panels in Locations 1-5 (see image below). Roof sections 1-5 would have three solar panels each. Additionally proposed are 14 solar panels on the sloped roof behind the sanctuary (Location 6) and four solar panels on the flat roof at the southeast corner of the church (Location 7). The roofs are all covered with asphalt shingles. Meters, disconnects, and utility shut-offs would be located on the ground at the church's southeast corner, near Location 7.



Detroit Parcel Viewer view of the subject property at 1950 Trumbull. The Parish House has a large solar array that was staff approved in 2018. The sanctuary is visible with its front façade on the west end of the building, and the one-story, shed-roofed passages north and south of the sanctuary are also visible. Staff has numbered the one-story, shed-roofed areas south of the sanctuary between the buttresses Locations 1 through 5, where solar panels are proposed. The sloped roof behind the sanctuary (Location 6) and the flat roof at the church's southeast corner (Location 7) are also proposed for solar panels.



Photo from July 2025 site visit, staff. St Peter's Episcopal Church, south side of sanctuary with numbered labels for solar panels. These labels correspond to the labels on the Parcel Viewer view above.

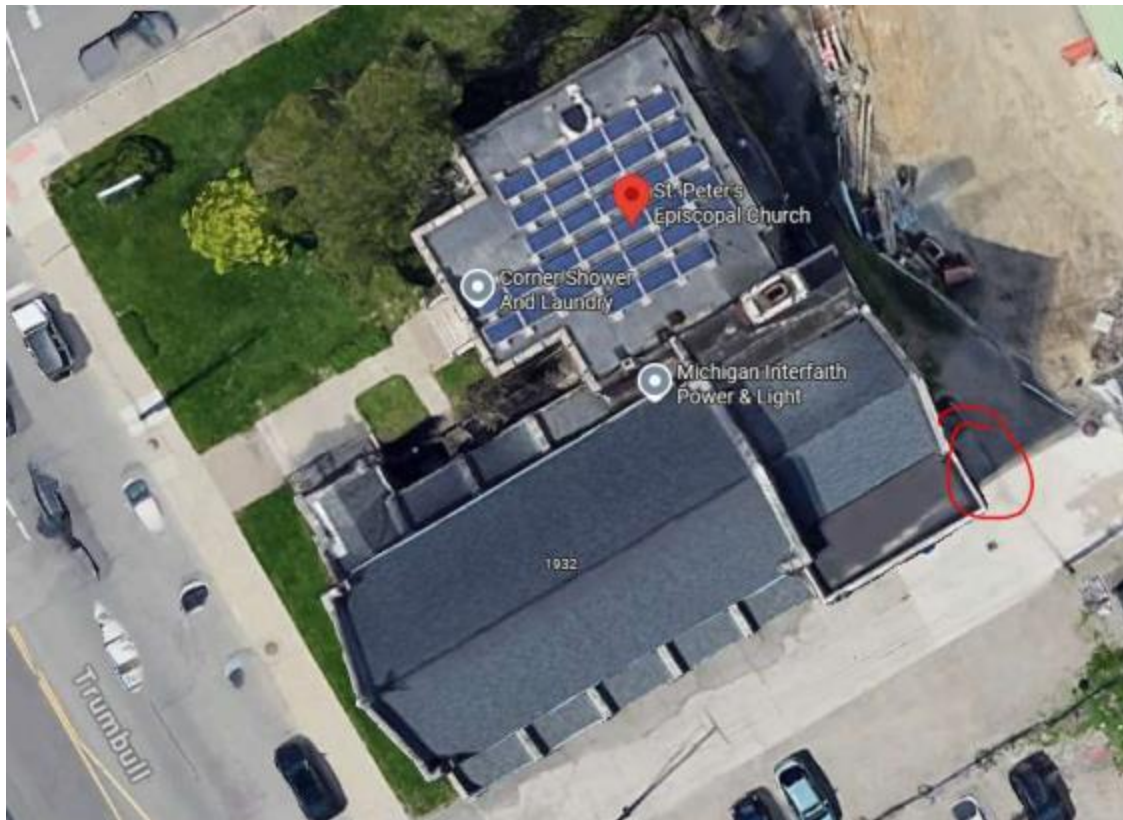


Photo provided by applicant in an email July 28, 2025 showing the solar installation on the Parish House to the sanctuary's north, approved by staff in 2018. Also visible is a red circle at the southeast corner of the building, indicating the proposed shutoff and meter location.



Photo provided by the applicant July 28, 2025 showing typical solar disconnects and meters. Please note that this is a photo of another site—not this proposed site. The products shown are representative of the products one would expect to see at St Peter's Episcopal Church as well.

For additional details about the proposal, please see attached detailed documents provided by the applicant.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- Applicant clarified in the July 28, 2025 email that most of the solar panels will be installed flush with the current pitch of the roof. On the flat portion of the roof (staff's Location 7), the panels will be tilted at 10 degrees so that one end of the panel would be sitting about three inches from the surface of the roof, and the opposite end of the panel would be projecting about eight inches from the roof's surface. Staff does not know how tall the parapet is in Location 7, but staff believes the parapet would help hide the solar panels.
- Currently, roofs are covered in non-historic asphalt shingles.
- Staff can approve rooftop solar panel installations administratively on the conditions that: the solar panels would be installed in areas with limited to-no visibility to the public right-of-way; roof-mounted panels shall be flat-mounted, located on a rear roof elevation and/or garage, with adequate distance from roof edges and ridge; panels shall have a matte, dark finish consistent with the color of the existing roofing material; and the installation(s) shall comply with the National Park Service, Technical Preservation Service document, *Incorporating Solar Panels in a Rehabilitation Project* (ITS Number 52). It is staff's opinion that the solar installations proposed in Locations 6 and 7 meet these criteria and could have been staff-approved.
- *Incorporating Solar Panels in a Rehabilitation Project* (ITS Number 52) shows compatible solar installations that are low profile on inconspicuous locations on buildings. It is staff's opinion that in this case, solar installations in locations 6 and 7 in the marked-up Parcel Viewer photo above meet the guidelines the NPS establishes in this document for compatible installations. Location 6 is at the building's rear on a secondary slope, and the low-profile solar panels would be on a dark gray roof. They would be visible, but staff doesn't think they would diminish the historic building's character. Staff believes that the solar installation at location 6 would have minimal visibility from the public right-of-way. Staff finds that location 7 is an excellent location for solar panels in terms of minimal visibility from the right-of-way, as the roof here is flat and behind a parapet that would at least partially shield the solar panels from view.
- *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* (the Solar Technology section of these guidelines has been included as part of this staff report) outline actions that are recommended and not recommended for historic buildings. Recommended is "Installing a solar device in a compatible location on the site or on a non-historic building or addition where it will have minimal impact on the historic building and its site." Also recommended is "Installing a low-profile solar device on the historic building so that it is not visible or only minimally visible from the public right of way: for example, on a flat roof and set back to take advantage of a parapet or other roof feature to screen solar panels from view; or on a secondary slope of a roof, out of view from the public right of way." The proposed work at Locations 6 and 7 both follow these Sustainability Guidelines, in staff's opinion.
- All solar panels and mounting hardware are of appropriate color, size and scale, and staff finds the proposed location for disconnects and meters appropriately out of view from the right-of-way.

ISSUES

- The proposed solar installations in Locations 1 through 5 on the low shed roofs between south-side buttresses do not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standards 2 and 9, or the Solar Technology Guidelines included in *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in staff's opinion.
 - 2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.
 - 9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of the property and its environment.
 - The Solar Technology section of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* states that it is not recommended to place "a solar device in a highly-visible location where it will negatively impact the historic building and its site." It is staff's opinion that installing solar panels on the roofs of the bays between the buttresses on the building's south side will be highly visible from Trumbull for a long distance and that the solar panels in these highly visible locations will diminish the historic church's character, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION #1 of 2—Denial—Install 15 solar panels on the roofs of bays between buttresses along the church's south side

Staff recommends that the placement of the solar panels on the roofs of the one-story bays between the buttresses on the church's south side does not meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standards 2 and 9, and that it does not conform to *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*.

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property will be avoided.

9. New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction will not destroy historic materials, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property. The new work will be differentiated from the old and will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

For the following reasons:

It is staff's opinion that solar panels on the sloped, low roofs between the buttresses on the church's south side will be highly visible from Trumbull for a long distance and that the solar panels in these highly visible locations will diminish the historic church's character, features, and spatial relationships that characterize the property, contrary to the National Park Service guidance pertaining to rooftop solar

installations on historic buildings.

RECOMMENDATION #2 OF 2—Certificate of Appropriateness—Install 18 solar panels on the sloped and flat roofs at the southeast corner of the building

Staff finds that the placement of the solar panels at the southeast corner of the church, both on the sloped roof of the rear addition and on the flat roof on the square portion of the building (staff-assigned locations 6 and 7), meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and these two proposed solar installations also meet *The Secretary of The Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation & Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. Staff recommends their approval.