

**STAFF REPORT 08-13-2025 REGULAR MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00393**

**ADDRESS: 301-321 EDMUND PLACE**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK**

**APPLICANT/ARCHITECT: REID MAUTI/MCINTOSH PORIS ARCHITECTS**

**DEVELOPER: WOODWARD CAPITAL PARTNERS**

**PROPERTY OWNER: CITY OF DETROIT (HRD RFP – LAND SALE)**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 06-24-2025**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 07-24-2025**

**SCOPE: ERECT MIXED-USE BUILDING WITH ACCESSORY PARKING LOT**



*View of 301-321 Edmund Place, to the west (vacant lot). The Brush/Watson Development, under construction and previously approved by the HDC, is visible in the background, across Brush Street. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.*

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The property, located on the north side of the second block east of Woodward (corner of Brush), is composed of two parcels currently occupied by a weedy meadow with some areas of asphalt/gravel. A “desire path” crosses the parcel. As is true of many vacant development sites in Brush Park, the site is surrounded by a mix of nineteenth-century mansions, early twentieth-century commercial buildings, and recent twenty-first century redevelopment. The adjacent streets and alleys are modern concrete/asphalt. A parking meter station exists in the Edmund Place right-of-way.

The subject parcels, in the historic era, were occupied by three nineteenth-century brick mansions, none of which survived into the 1980s when the historic district was designated by City Council. One of the houses was gone by 1950. At some point, the two easternmost parcels were combined into a single parcel.



*Similar view to the northeast, this time including 291 Edmund Place, the historic house to the west of the subject development parcel. The white car is parked in front of the development parcel. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.*



*View to the south. The development parcel is centered in this image and is serving as a de facto parking lot for the adjacent construction project. The alley does not exhibit any original paving brick. The Renaissance Center is visible down Brush Street at the left. The new buildings at Edmund Place and Brush (south side) were previously approved by this Commission. 291 Edmund Place (orange brick mansion) is center image right. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.*





*Reverse view to the northwest of 291 Edmund Place and historic context. This gilded age mansion was rehabilitated into a multi-family condominium per HDC approval. The weedy meadow in the foreground is the southwest corner of the current development parcel. The wrought-iron style fencing at the property line, visible here, is proposed to be retained as part of the landscape buffer. Staff photo, July 24, 2025. Compare HDAB designation photo of same, below.*

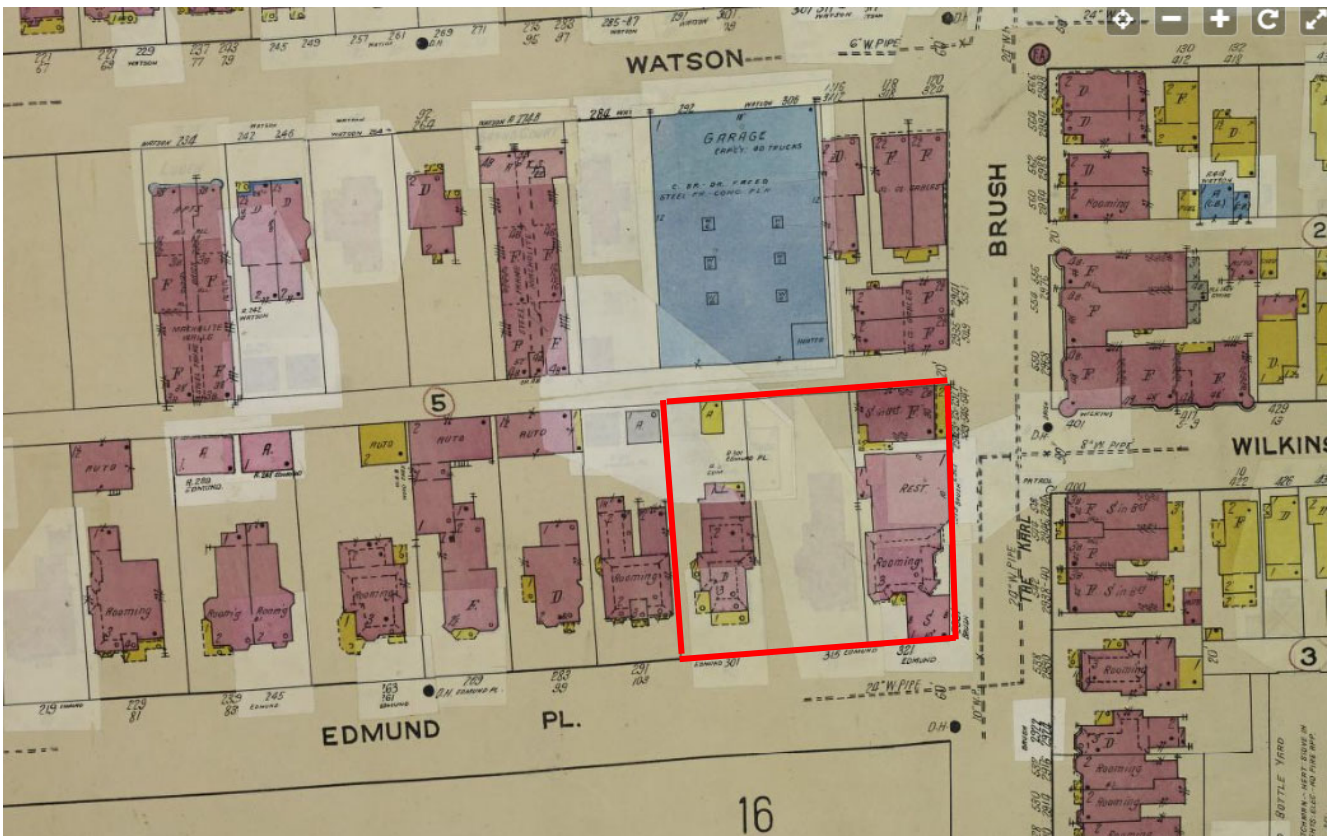


*HDAB Designation Photo, April 1980. In this similarly oriented view from 45 years ago, the year of the district's creation, the vacant status of the subject parcel is apparent (foreground) Note lack of ornamental fence, and the casual use of the lot for parking. Although not relevant to this application, it is worthwhile to note the loss of roof character at 291 Edmund Place, evident in the replacement of the true slate visible here with the imitation asphalt reproduction "slate" seen today in the previous photos, which in staff's opinion detracts from this property's character.*





Subject site outlined in red. North is up. Detroit Parcel Viewer.



301-321 Edmund Place, circa 1950 (Sanborn Map). Current development parcel (outlined in red) then held two large brick houses altered into rooming houses. Note the substantial changes in the vicinity made obvious by the pasted edits. A former nineteenth-century mansion at 311 Edmund Place is demolished. The nineteenth century house at the corner has been expanded with a store (S) and a restaurant. Note historic density of this vicinity, including 4-story multi-family buildings to the east across Brush Street.

## PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes a 57-unit, 4-story, mixed use multi-family housing development, including a 26-car surface parking lot to the west and approximately 1300 SF of ground-floor retail at the northwest corner of Brush and Edmund Place, per the submitted drawings, narrative, and documents. The building features a gray-mix brick masonry cladding, arranged in stepped bays that accommodate the angled street. The bays are relieved by opaque panels placed vertically between the windows. Horizontal cast stone elements are used at the window sills and parapet. Storefronts accommodate a commercial use at the corner of Edmund Place/Brush Street.

The proposal includes landscaping in several locations: at the Brush Street frontage, in a formal garden (“private linear park”) between the building and the parking lot, and then again at the western perimeter of the parking lot. A dog run area is additionally proposed for the development’s southwest corner, along the Edmund Place frontage, stepping the parking lot back from Edmund Place.

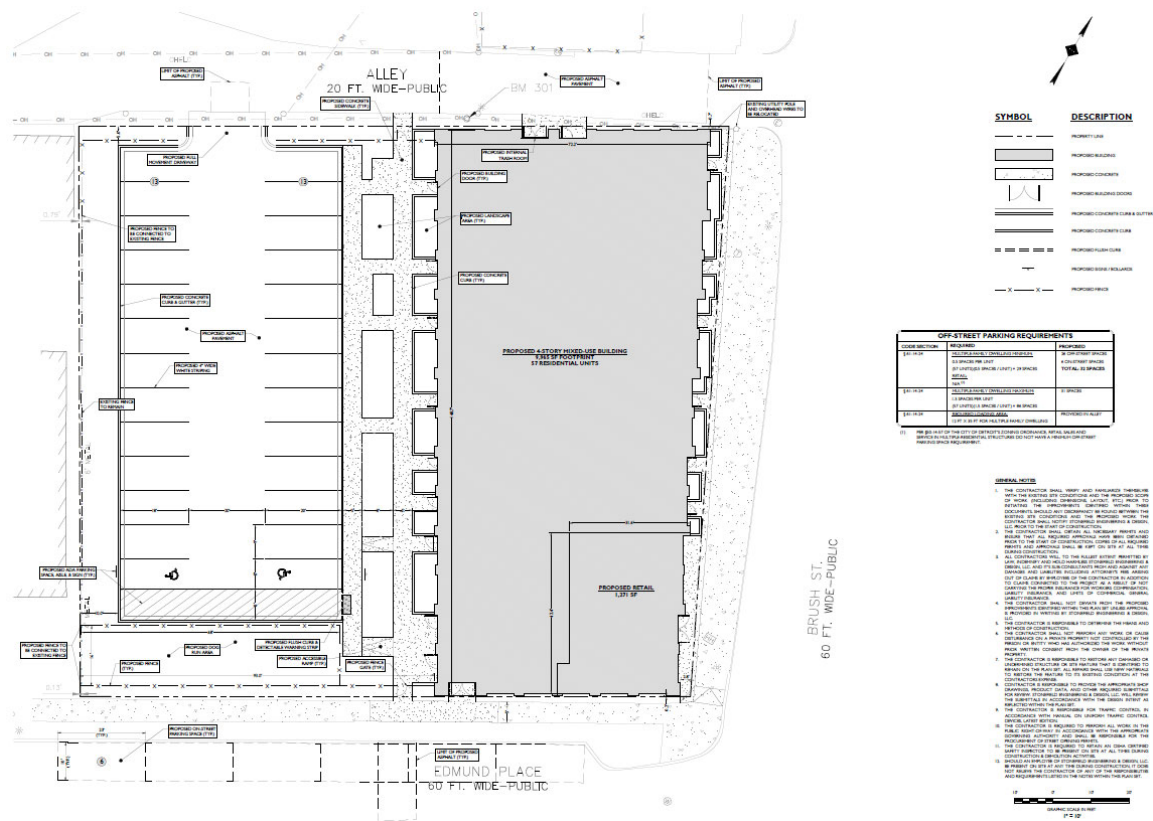


*From applicant’s submission: Looking northwest, primary elevations along Edmund Place/Brush Street. Note 291 Edmund Place at left.*





*From applicant's submission: Looking northeast from Edmund Place, showing rear elevation and vegetative buffer adjacent to dog run area. Note however that the vegetation depicted here is at odds with the landscape plan, which suggests a single row of junipers. Coincidentally, the white car illustrated here is in very nearly the same position as the white car in the staff site photos on pages 1-2.*



*From applicant's submission: Site plan*

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS

- The Brush Park Historic District was established in 1980. Per the district map included in the Historic Designation Advisory Board report, all subject parcels (301-321 Edmund Place) were vacant at designation. There are no designation photographs in HDC files that show the subject parcels; as vacant lots were rarely photographed, this helps confirm the lack of resources on these parcels.
- The development team for this city-owned parcel was awarded the site in response to an RFP issued by the Housing & Revitalization Department (HRD). HRD staff will be on hand to answer any Commission questions.
- In the last decade, the district has seen substantial HDC-approved redevelopment of similar vacant parcels, typically in a contemporary design inflected with contextual cues. Scale, massing, textures, and rebuilding the historic density of the district has been important to the Commission. Per NPS Guidelines and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, it is not required that new additions to a traditional historic district reproduce obsolete historic styles.
- As a guide to new construction, the Elements of Design for this district does offer the following (excerpted) relevant points:
  - **Element 1, Height:** *Height varies in the district from one to 11 stories...Later changes included the construction of apartment buildings among the houses, the majority of which are three stories in height...In the case of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century houses located between Woodward Avenue and Brush, the 2½ story height implies more height in feet than usual, since ceiling heights in these houses are unusually high.*
  - **Element 2, Proportion of buildings' front facades:** *Buildings in the district are usually taller than wide...*
  - **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the facades:** *Areas of void generally constitute between 15 and 35 percent of the total façade area, excluding the roof. Proportions of the openings themselves are generally taller than wide; in some cases, vertically proportioned units are combined to fill an opening wider than tall.*
  - **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in front facades:** *Victorian structures in the district often display great freedom in the placement of openings in the facades...In later apartments, openings tend to be very regular.*
  - **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets:** *The area between Woodward and Brush appears to have been developed in a very regular spacing...this regularity has been disrupted by the demolition of many of the houses, and the vacant land resulting...*
  - **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections:** *Most buildings have or had a porch or entrance projection...*
  - **Element 7, Relationship of materials:** *By far the most prevalent material in the district is common brick; other forms of brick, stone and wood trim are common... Some later buildings have stucco wall surfaces...*
  - **Element 8, Relationship of textures:** *The most common relationship of textures in the district is the low relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted to the smoother or rougher surfaces of stone or wood trim...*
  - **Element 9, Relationship of colors:** *Brick red predominates...other natural brick and stone colors are also present...*
  - **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details:** *On the buildings of the Victorian period, elaborate detail in wood, stone, or sheet metal was common; areas included porches, window and door surrounds, cornices, dormers, and other areas. Later buildings are generally simpler, but include less elaborate detail in similar areas.*
  - **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes:** *Examples of many roof shapes, including pitched gable roofs, hip roofs, mansard roofs, and gambrel roofs are present. Different types are sometimes combined in a single structure...Later apartment buildings and commercial buildings generally have flat roofs not visible from the ground.*
  - **Element 12, Walls of continuity:** *Some of the later apartments have not been set back to the same line as the houses amongst which they were built...Where buildings are continuous, a wall of continuity is created.*
  - **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments:** *The major*

*landscape feature of the district is vacant land, which creates a feeling that buildings are missing in the district....*

- **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures:** *There is a large quantity of open space in the area, due to demolition of buildings...The feeling created is that buildings are missing and should be present.*
- **Element 15, Scale of facades and façade elements:** *Later apartments are in scale with simple but large elements near the ground and repetitive window openings above, frequently capped by a substantial cornice.*
- **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevations:** *A substantial majority of the buildings in the district have front facades vertically expressed...*
- **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks:** *...older houses on the east-west streets between Woodward Avenue and Brush have some setback, which varies from street to street, though generally consistent in any one block. Later apartments and commercial structures in that area often ignore the previously established setback...*
- **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverage:** *Later apartments and commercial buildings often fill a much higher percentage of the lot, sometimes approaching or reaching complete lot coverage...*
- **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade:** *The older houses in the district are generally characterized by a high degree of complexity within the facades...later apartments and commercial buildings tend to have more classical decorative elements of a simpler kind.*
- **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews:** *The vacant land in the area, largely the result of demolition, creates long-distance views and views of individual buildings from unusual angles which are foreign to the character of the neighborhood as an intensely developed urban area. Garages and coach houses are located in the rear of residential properties and are generally oriented to the alley.*
- **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance:** *Asymmetrical but balanced compositions are common. Later apartments are generally symmetrical.*
- **Element 22, General environmental character:** *The environmental character is of an old urban neighborhood which has undergone, and is undergoing, considerable change...*
- The applicant, in their presentation materials, discusses how they consider the proposed design meets the Elements outlined above.
- The proposed dominant materials, including brick, and imitation wood, are grounded in the materials and expressions used on historic buildings in the district, or are modern analogs. Across the facades, materials, and architectural detail relationships are deployed and articulated in a manner that is appropriate for a new building within the historic context. In staff's opinion, the robust features, overall articulation, and treatment of openings across the building are in general conformance with the Elements of Design.
- However, staff does recommend that another scale or level of complexity should be added to the design to improve the building's compatibility with its richly textured and ornamented historic context. The most obvious improvement, in staff's opinion, would be to add additional articulation to the window openings by adding subdivisions in the window systems.
- For a dense urban development, the proposal includes fairly well-developed landscaping, including rhododendrons and heuchera (evergreen perennials) at the Brush Street frontage, plantings in a formal garden between the building and the parking lot (including small ornamentals like serviceberry and redbud), and then additional plantings at the western perimeter of the parking lot, including three honey locust trees and a number of evergreen trees/shrubs. A dog run area is additionally proposed for the development's southwest corner, along the Edmund Place frontage, and is visually separated from the sidewalk by a row of junipers.
- Knowing that off-street parking associated with new construction is a requirement of new development in Detroit, the Commission has regularly approved parking lots to serve in this capacity (as opposed to commercial parking lots disconnected from a particular building, which have not found as much favor). Staff recommends that the addition of the parking lot, in the context of supporting this important new infill development along Brush, is acceptable under the NPS guideline of "cumulative effect," which permits some less compatible elements in the context of a generally appropriate and compatible project.





the setback of the historic house, which we find to be an appropriate and deferential gesture to the historical Edmund Place setback line.

- The increasing density of Brush Park directly addresses the problem of vacant land created by demolition as identified in Elements 13, 14, and 20 by the framers of the 1980 ordinance establishing the district. This proposed project will continue that positive trend by reintroducing buildings to a vacant parcel in support of “the character of the neighborhood as an intensely developed urban area.”

## **ISSUES**

- Though generally compatible with the varied historic context and Elements of Design for Brush Park, staff recommends that the building should incorporate additional smaller scale texture and detail, including but not limited to subdivision of the large undivided windows, to create fine-grained architectural interest in the facades analogous to the district’s historic prototypes. Such subdivision should not necessarily be traditional and can be in keeping with the contemporary expression of the building.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

Staff recommends that the proposal for a mixed-use building at 301-321 Edmund Place should qualify for a Certificate of Appropriateness, as it meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the Brush Park Historic District’s Elements of Design, with the condition that:

- The design be further developed by incorporating smaller scale texture and detail, including but not limited to subdivision of the large undivided windows. Upon receipt of an updated design, staff may approve the revisions for permit if consistent with the Elements of Design and the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, or return the design to the Commission for further review if necessary.