

**STAFF REPORT: 10/8/2025 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: J. ROSS**

**ADDRESS: 644 & 656 SELDEN**

**APPLICATION NO: HDC2025-00493**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: WILLIS-SELDEN LOCAL**

**APPLICANT: LARS GRAEBNER/VOLUMEONE DESIGN STUDIO, LLC**

**OWNER: SELDEN PARTNERS LLC**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 9/22/2025**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 9/15/2025**

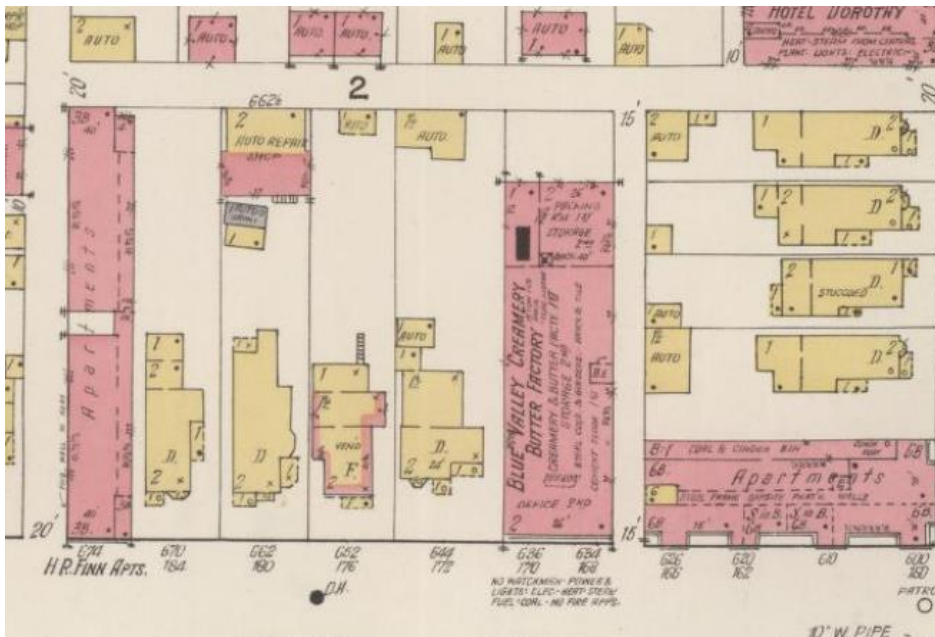
**SCOPE: ERECT TRELLIS, INSTALL HISTORIC SIGN AT SIDE WALL**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The building located at 644 Selden was erected in 1927 and was originally known as the Owasso Casket building. The Georgian Revival style building was designed by Weston & Ellington, architect. The original portion of the building is two-stories in height and is topped with a modern two-story rooftop addition. The front façade features brick cladding with limestone quoins and a centrally located primary entrance with a limestone door surround (recently painted black without HDC approval). A synthetic cornice/parapet, installed ca. 2019, tops the front wall. The west façade walls are painted brick. Windows are recently installed, 6/6 double-hung aluminum windows at the front façade and aluminum fixed and awning units at the side wall. The primary/front entrance is a single metal door with a sidelite while those located at the west façade are paired aluminum doors. The parcel at 656 Selden is a paved, open dining/gathering space that includes benches and planters.



644 and 656 Selden, current appearance. Photo by HDC staff taken on 9/22/2025



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1921. 600 Block of Selden, north side of street



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951. 600 Block of Selden, north side of street. 644 Selden is outlined in red. Sometime after 1951, the residential buildings at 662/656 and 652 Selden were demolished.





644 (left) and 656 (right) Selden, parcels outlined in yellow. Detroit Parcel Viewer

## PROPOSAL

Per the current submission, the applicant is seeking to undertake the following exterior work:

- Erect a wood trellis to the west of the building. The trellis will be constructed of 6"x6" untreated timber posts and will be 11'-6" tall and 8'-9" wide. 2"x2" purlins will form a screen and open roof structure to allow for climbing plants to be an integral part of the structure. The entire structure will be fastened to the concrete pavement and the existing west facade of the building and will include LED downlights. Steel signage will be installed atop the trellis.
- At west façade, first story, replace southernmost doors (non-historic age) with new doors (materials not specified)
- Remove black paint from the front/south façade's limestone entry surround.
- Remove east and west façade painted murals that were added in 2019.
- At the location of the former the west facade mural install new metal signage
- Relocate the restored "Smith Welding" blade sign from the front facade to the west side façade towards the rear of the wall, facing the courtyard/656 Selden

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS RESEARCH

- The Willis-Selden Local Historic District was designated as a local historic district in 2011
- See the photo below of the building which was taken by staff on 1/28/2025. Note that the historic age "Smith Welding Supply Co." neon sign was located at the building's front façade.

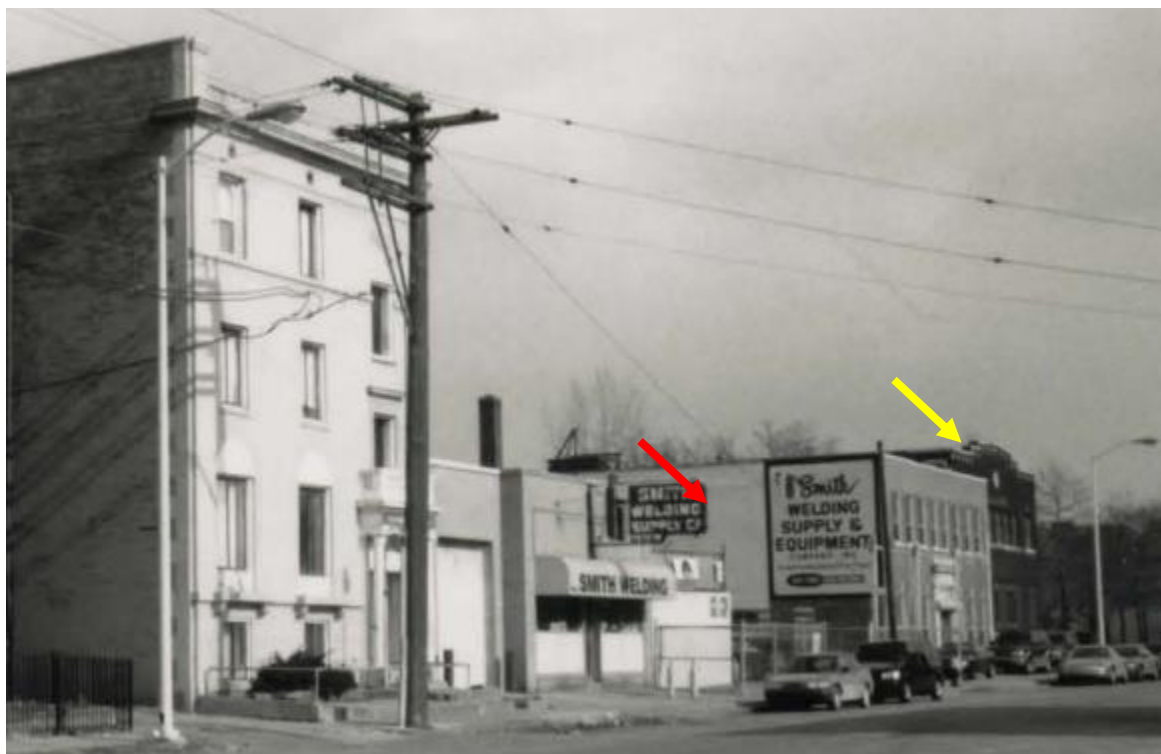


644 Selden, photo taken in 1/2025. Yellow arrow indicates the historic neon sign that was present

- Note that an application (#HDC2025-00012) to rehabilitate the property was submitted to the Commission for review at the 2/12/2025 regular meeting [Applicant-12.pdf](#). Specifically, this application proposed to add a number of new elements to the 644 Selden, to include new metal and canvas awnings at the front and side façades, a new blade sign at the building’s southwest corner, and a new set of doors with tile surround at the west façade, first story. The project also proposed to paint over the west and east façade murals that were added to the building in 2019 and to permanently remove the historic-age “Smith Welding Supply Co.” neon sign that had been installed at the building’s front façade in 2019. In their staff report for the 2/12/2025 meeting staff did note that the historic neon sign was originally located at 666 Selden, the former Smith Welding Shop building and likely dates from 1950, when the Smith Welding Shop Building/666 Selden was erected (see below photos). It was removed from its original location in 2019 when 666 Selden was rehabilitated for use as a bar/arcade. At that time the sign was restored and installed at its current location/644 Selden and served as the business sign for the Smith and Co. restaurant. The Commission approved the project [HDC2025-00012 COA.pdf](#), but included a number of conditions, to include a requirement that the historic-age “Smith Welding Supply Co.” neon sign that had been installed at the building’s front façade in 2019 be retained should the project go forward. Specifically, the Commission stated the following with respect to the sign:
  - *“The historic neon sign has achieved the status of a landmark in its own right, apart from 644 Selden/the building to which it is attached, and is recognized as a focal point in the neighborhood. The historic neon sign is characteristic of a specific period within the district’s history and remains a good representative of a “great twentieth-*



*century contribution to the signmaker's art.” The historic neon sign is one of the few remaining examples of its type within the historic district. The historic neon sign at the front façade may be removed from the 644 Selden façade with the condition that there is a plan for its reinstallation in a location on Selden that presents it as a landmark, subject to staff review and approval.*



**Ca. 1997. Note that the historic age “Smith Welding Supply Co.” neon sign is at its original location/666 Selden. The yellow arrow indicates 644 Selden, the subject of the current application**



**Google Streetview, 2015. Note that the historic age “Smith Welding Supply Co.” neon sign is at its original location/666 Selden. The yellow arrow indicates 644 Selden, the subject of the current application**



Appearance of the as installed at 644 Selden, taken by staff 1/28/2025

- See the below photo of current conditions to note that the historic neon sign is no longer present at the 644 Selden's front façade, despite that fact that the scope of work that the Commission approved at the 2/10/2025 meeting will no longer be undertaken. With the current submission, the applicant is proposing to install the sign at the building's west façade, north of the new trellis, to the rear of the building, facing the open courtyard space at 656 Selden (see the below).



Photo taken by HDC staff on 9/22/2025. Showing current conditions/that the historic neon sign has been removed



Blade Sign  
New location



**Proposed new location of the historic neon sign. 644 Selden, west façade.**

- As noted above, at their 2/10/2025 regular meeting the Commission determined that the historic neon sign “has achieved the status of a landmark in its own right, apart from 644 Selden/the building to which it is attached, and is recognized as a focal point in the neighborhood.” They further required that the sign be reinstalled in a “... location on Selden that presents it as a landmark” as a condition of their approval of the previous application. However, since that project which was approved at the 2/10/2025 meeting will no longer be undertaken, staff has submitted the current proposal to install the sign at 644 Selden’s west façade to the Commission for review within the context of the current project.
- While the sign will not be highly visible when facing the building from the street, staff does note that it will be visible while standing in the open courtyard space. Staff also notes that the property owner’s ability to install the sign in a new location is limited to the parcels under their control. Finally, the sign’s integrity of location was diminished when it was removed from its original location/666 Selden. Staff supports the current proposal as it seeks to provide signage for the new business which will occupy the building while retaining the historic sign in a location that will be in close vicinity to its original location
- It is staff’s opinion that the remaining work items are generally appropriate to/compatible with the building’s historic character. However, staff does note the following:
  - The means to remove the painted murals and the black paint from the front façade’s limestone entry door surround has not been outlined. Staff does recommend that the applicant use the gentlest means possible to remove the paint from the masonry in order to avoid damaging these elements.
  - The new wood trellis is proposed to be built from untreated/unpainted lumber. It is staff’s opinion that leaving the trellis unpainted is incompatible with the historic masonry buildings within the structure’s near vicinity. Staff therefore recommends that the trellis be painted a compatible color.
  - The material for the new west facade doorway has not been noted in the current application

## ISSUES

- The means to remove the painted murals and the black paint from the front’ façade’s limestone entry door surround has not been outlined in the current application.
- The material for the new west facade doorway has not been noted in the current application

- The new wood trellis is proposed to be built from untreated/unpainted lumber. It is staff's opinion that leaving the trellis unpainted is incompatible with the historic masonry buildings within the structure's near vicinity. The wood should be painted or coated with a solid color stain.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

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

#### **Recommendation 1 of 1, Certificate of Appropriateness**

Staff recommends that the project will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Willis-Selden Local Historic District's Elements of Design, with the conditions that:

- The applicant shall use the gentlest means to remove the painted murals and the black paint from the front' façade's limestone entry door surround has not been outlined in the current application. The process for removal shall be submitted to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the permit.
- The material for the new west facade shall be submitted to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the permit.
- The new wood trellis shall be painted a color that is complementary to the 644 Selden's exterior cladding's color palate within a year of its erection. The final color choice shall be submitted to HDC staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of the permit.