

STAFF REPORT: 10-08-25 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00243

ADDRESS: 14501-14523 EAST JEFFERSON

HISTORIC DISTRICT: JEFFERSON-CHALMERS HISTORIC BUSINESS

APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER: STEVEN NOFAR/REAL DETROIT PROPERTIES LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 07-11-2025

DATES OF STAFF SITE VISITS: 07-24-2025, 08-29-2025, 09-26-2025

SCOPE: DEMOLISH THREE (3) COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS



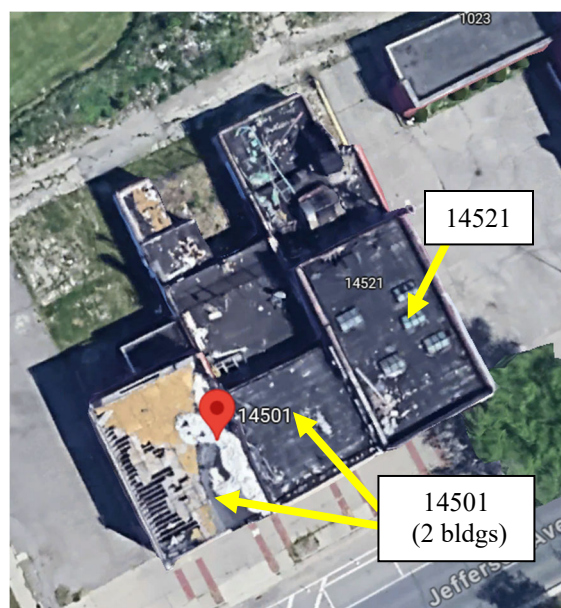
View of 14501-14521 East Jefferson from the corner of Marlborough. 14521 East Jefferson is the brick fronted structure at far right; the other two buildings are clad with non-historic dryvit. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

This application concerns three originally distinct historic-age buildings. Two of them (jointly addressed today as 14501 East Jefferson), were combined into a single commercial use, to include opening up the interior walls separating them. The westernmost of the three buildings suffered a substantial fire several years ago and has received haphazard and incomplete repairs, and is in a visible and advanced state of failure.

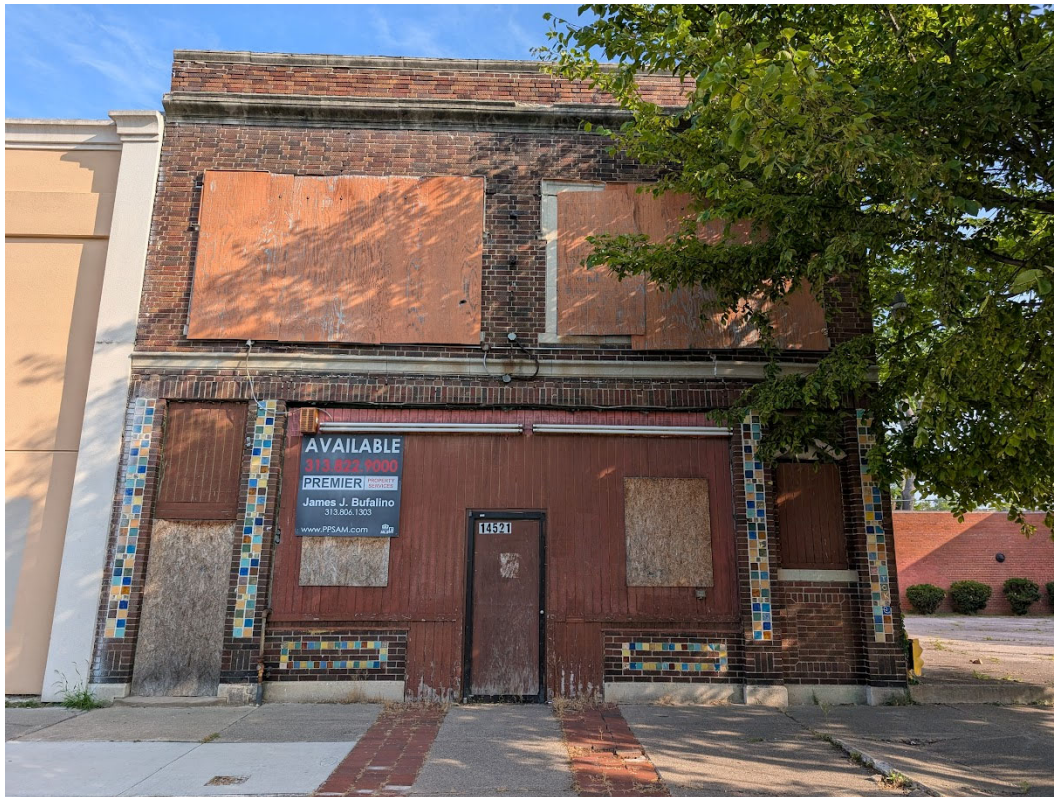
The third building, 14521 East Jefferson, is the easternmost of the three subject buildings and occupies a separate legal parcel. This building still maintains its historic brick and stone commercial exterior expression, and has only modest signs of deterioration visible from the exterior.

All three buildings (on two legal parcels) are under common ownership at present.





Location of subject property (blue dot) in the Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business HD (light green).



View of 14501-14523 East Jefferson, the easternmost building, and the only one of the three exhibiting contributing historic character, in staff's opinion. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.



View of the westernmost building under review, sharing an address of 14501 East Jefferson; originally known as 14507-09 East Jefferson (refer to Sanborn map later in this report). Staff photo, July 24, 2025.



View of the center building under review, sharing an address of 14501 East Jefferson; originally known as 14513-15 East Jefferson (refer to Sanborn map later in this report). Staff photo, July 24, 2025.



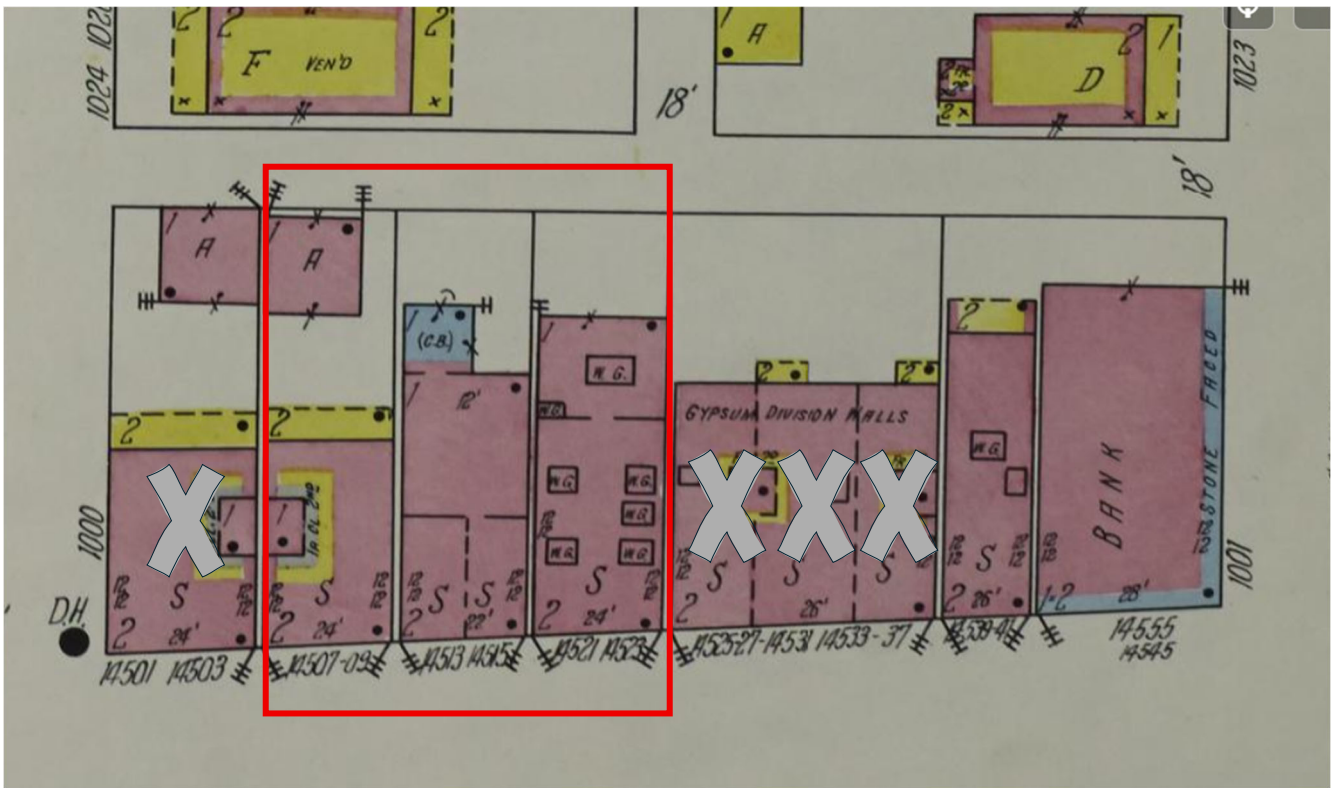
Rear view of buildings, looking south. Westernmost building at right. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.



Rear view of 14521 East Jefferson, looking south. This is the rear of the easternmost building. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.



14521 East Jefferson outlined in yellow (easternmost building). The larger combined parcel holding 14501 East Jefferson (two buildings) is to the immediately left, or west, extending to Marlborough Street. North is up. Detroit Parcel Viewer.



1929 Sanborn map of the commercial block between Marlborough (left) and Phillip (right). The subject properties are outlined in red. Buildings marked with an "X" have been demolished; note that the original 14501-14503 East Jefferson at the corner is long gone. The combined building now known as 14501 East Jefferson are the two buildings here addressed as 14507-09 and 14513-15 East Jefferson. 14521-14523 East Jefferson completes the three.

PROPOSAL

The applicant proposes to demolish all three buildings on the two parcels identified as 14501 and 14521 East Jefferson. After demolition, in response to staff inquiry, the applicant states that the property will be “flat” and maintained as a mowed lawn. The parking lot described in the original application has been withdrawn from the application and is not under review today.

The applicant has provided photos and reports in support of their demolition request, available on the HDC public website.

While initially submitted in July, and duly docketed for the August 2025 HDC Meeting, this application was withdrawn and postponed by the applicant. After redocketing for the September 2025 HDC Meeting, the applicant withdrew the application again. It has thus been redocketed for the current October 2025 Meeting.

NOTICE TO PROCEED: FOR INFORMATION ONLY

- This information is provided to the Commission in cases where staff anticipates a Notice to Proceed may become a subject of discussion and is not meant to endorse or recommend this outcome, or consideration thereof.
- A Notice-to-Proceed (NTP) is an alternate approval path available to the Commission for historically inappropriate work. None of the Elements, nor the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, need to be satisfied. An alternate set of conditions (or “prongs”), codified in Section 21-2-75, are prescribed by state law and local ordinance, that being:

(1)The resource constitutes a hazard to the safety of the public or the occupants;

(2)The resource is a deterrent to a major improvement program that will be of substantial benefit to the community. Substantial benefit shall be found only if the applicant proposing the work has obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing, and environmental clearances, and the improvement program is otherwise feasible;

(3)Retention of the resource would cause undue financial hardship to the owner. Undue financial hardship shall be found only when a governmental action, an act of God, or other events beyond the owner's control created the hardship, and all feasible alternatives to eliminate the financial hardship, which may include offering the resource for sale at its fair market value or moving the resource to an appropriate vacant site within the historic district, have been attempted and exhausted by the owner;

(4)Retention of the resource would not be in the interest of the majority of the community.

- The Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, in April 2022, produced a document concerning the issuance of Notices-to-Proceed by Michigan HDCs as part of their [CLG \(Certified Local Government\) programming resources](#). A [Certified Local Government](#) is a Michigan municipality that enforces a local historic district ordinance via a state-enabled Historic District Commission. This document (available on this property’s public website) makes the following points, presented verbatim in *italics*:

- **Concerning prong 1, public safety hazards**, SHPO dictates (emphasis in original):

*As a best practice, use of this criteria should be based, **at minimum**, on a thorough, unbiased structural assessment report prepared by a licensed engineer. Reports should be prepared by engineers experienced in historic preservation as historic building systems are often quite different from their modern counterparts.*

In documenting its decision, the HDC should reference specific evidence to support its conclusions and show that the burden of proof has been met rather than broadly stating the “report is satisfactory” or something similar. Also keep in mind that HDCs have the ability to retain an on-call historical architect or preservation specialist that can provide advisory support to the HDC in such situations. This option is particularly useful in communities where the HDC does not include a commissioner with professional preservation experience. [Note that, in Detroit, both professional staff and the Commission include licensed and experienced historic architects.]

- **Concerning prong 2, deterrent to a major improvement program**, SHPO dictates (emphasis in original):

This criteria requires that additional considerations be met by the applicant. Specifically, the applicant must have obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing, and environmental clearances. These steps are important as the intent of this criteria is to minimize instances where action is taken on a hypothetical project that is still very much dependent on future actions that may or may not happen. If the project is contingent on actions still to be taken, it cannot be processed under this criteria. The other key consideration is that, per PA 169 [Michigan’s Local Historic Districts Act, Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended], for a NTP to be issued, the proposed work has to be necessary to substantially improve or correct the condition. Being broadly associated with a proposed development site isn’t enough. The continued existence of the historic resource in its original location must in and of itself be a contributing deterrent.

In documenting use of the NTP, the HDC should explicitly identify the substantial community benefit, including known and anticipated positive impacts and the sources of information upon which they are based, and enumerate all steps completed by the applicant.

- **Concerning prong 3, undue financial hardship**, SHPO dictates (emphasis in original):

PA 169 sets a high bar for demonstrating undue financial hardship. Specifically, the hardship must be due to an issue beyond the owner’s control and the owner must have exhausted all feasible alternatives to eliminate the hardship before this criteria can be met.

Communities can identify specific documentation that must be submitted as part of a request under a financial hardship claim. Such documentation commonly includes appraisals, tax records, property income records, documentation of efforts to sell the property, and more. HDCs that have not done so are encouraged to establish such documentation standards as a best practice since this helps to ensure that decisions are based on a thorough understanding of the financial situation and efforts taken to eliminate the hardship.

- **Concerning prong 4, majority community interest**, SHPO dictates (emphasis in original):

While this criteria can be broadly interpreted, it should be carefully considered. It should not be looked at as a “catch all” out for a NTP or used lightly to benefit an individual developer or development company. The fact is that historic preservation in and of itself has been determined to be a public purpose under state and federal law. As such, any effort to demonstrate that retaining a historic resource is not in the interest of the community at large must be well founded and documented. Isolated editorials representing one person’s opinion or off-the-cuff remarks at a meeting or on social media do not by default represent majority community interest. The burden of proof lies with the applicant—not the HDC—to explicitly demonstrate wh it is not in the interest of the majority of the community to retain the resource and how that majority interest was determined.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

- The Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business District was established by City Council in August 2008.
- The current owner acquired the subject properties in 2016, per the applicant, approximately eight years after district designation.
- The applicant includes a report from Polaris Construction regarding their arguments in support of demolition. The letter is drafted by Robert Kato, President, who does not provide his credentials in historic preservation. Among the arguments presented:
 - *Due to significant deterioration, all of the buildings are structurally unsound and economically impractical to restore...Moreover, demolition of the structures on Lots 10 and 11 (14501-14515 East Jefferson) would further compromise the structural integrity of the building on Lot 12 (14521 E. Jefferson).*
 - *Specific issues include: Foundation failure, Buckling walls, Waving floors, Roof collapse*
 - *Public Safety Concerns including risk of collapse, falling debris, attracting trespassers, fire hazards, liability, etc.*
- In another submission to the Commission, titled “*Ltr to Historical Society...*” [sic], the applicant provides several arguments and exhibits in support of their demolition request. Included is a very brief letter from licensed structural engineer Gregory Sarkisian attesting to the necessity of the structures’ demolition. Historic preservation credentials or experience is not supplied. The information given is not broken down by individual building and is presumably meant to be applicable to all three buildings. While staff observed in-person the catastrophic failure of the floor diaphragm in the westernmost building (14501, described below), this condition was not observed by staff in the other two buildings, nor is the condition of the brick walls (particularly at 14521-23) consistent with the foundation damage claimed, in our assessment (see separate section, below, with photographs).
- Key documentation typically required by the Commission for demolition includes photographs showing catastrophic failure of structural systems integral to the building, both interior and exterior. Some photos have been submitted by the applicant.
- This analysis will be divided between the two buildings currently joined as one (now known as 14501 East Jefferson), and the third, easternmost building (14521 East Jefferson). Per staff analysis of Sanborn fire insurance maps, and available overhead views of the subject buildings, the three buildings involved are not party wall buildings (i.e., they do not share a single structural wall between buildings, each of the three buildings has its own pair of walls). Even when buildings with party walls are demolished, it is common for a party wall to be retained for the adjacent building; such conditions are widely observable in the city.

14501 EAST JEFFERSON (TWO BUILDINGS, ORIGINALLY 14507 & 14515)

- These two buildings, as discussed above and depicted on the early 20th century Sanborn maps, were originally designed as separate buildings. According to records in the Buildings Department (see building card at right), they were partially combined in 1986 via expansion of the first floor retail space. Original drawings or scope of work is not available, but this appears to be when the first floor masonry walls previously serving as the exterior walls of the individual buildings (14507 and 14515) were opened, joining the two as a pair.
- Staff notes that this alteration predated the establishment of the historic district by more than 20 years.
- Subsequent to the combination, the building pair apparently received a unified façade composed of “rough finished wooden sheets and panels...painted white” and served as a liquor store until shortly after the establishment of the Jefferson-Chalmers local historic district. During this time (circa 2007-2008), historic consultant staff surveyed the district for establishment as a National Register

14507 E. Jefferson A/K/A	
14515 E. Jefferson	
30814	2-11-86
	Lot No.
	Date
Use Masonry Store(s)	
Cons.	
	\$6,800.00
Remarks	O.K.
Expand Existing Retail	
Store with SDM/SDD Use at	
14507 E. Jefferson into	
Existing Retail Store at	
14515 E. Jefferson per	

district, but were also aware of the effort for local designation. A report prepared by the consultant, Rebecca Binno Savage, gives further background info on the building and its appearance at that time, and is reproduced in its entirety on the next pages of this report.

- Ms. Savage notes the incompatible façade present during her survey (again, a condition which was grandfathered into the local district upon establishment). As an incompatible treatment undertaken outside of the district's Period of Significance, she duly notes the combined building's **non-contributing** status to the proposed district, but opines that:

Considering the full history and evidence of the original buildings, it is hoped that the original facades have been merely covered and could one day be rediscovered and restored. This building would be eligible for consideration [i.e., for contributing status] at such a time.

**State of Michigan Historic Preservation Office
Intensive Level Survey
Jefferson East Survey**

Address

Street: 14507 E Jefferson
City: Detroit County: Wayne ZIP 48215-
Current Name: n/a
Historic Name: n/a

Evaluations

Contributes to:
NR Eligible: Not NR Eligible
Contributing: Non-Contributing Site
SHPO Evaluation:

Resources on Property/Status

Historic Use: COMMERCE/TRADE (CT)
Current Use: CT/business
Owner Type: Private

Main Building

Foundation	Roof:
1. Brick	1. N/A
2.	2.
3.	3.
Wall:	Other:
1. Brick	1.
2. Wood	2.
3.	3.

Architectural Classification: Other

Material Notes:

Description:

The building at 14507 East Jefferson is a two-story building that is comprised of two significantly altered, two-story brick buildings constructed on the two lots on which it stands. The facade is covered with rough finished wooden sheets and panels that have been painted. The second story windows have been covered and the bare wall provides space for the name of the business within. The ground floor has an offset full glass double door enframed in metal under a full-width pent roof. The facade is covered with wood clapboards which form a cornice along the flat parapet. The west elevation is clad in rectangular sheets of wood paneling that have been installed on a diagonal.

Other Buildings/Features:

Significant Persons:

Statement of Significance

The current building that houses the East Jefferson Market is comprised of two significantly altered, two-story brick buildings constructed in 1915 and 1924 on Lots 10 and 11. The owner of Lot 10 was Ernest J. Stark who purchased the property in 1913 from Kasper J. Schwemler. Schwemler bought Lot 10 and also the lot next to it, Lot 9, on which the parking lot is located, in 1912 from the widow of John Moning. The couple had owned the lots since 1894. The permit for construction on Lot 10 was issued in 1915 for a brick store and dwelling. Although not stated on the permit, it may be assumed that Schwemler was issued the permit and owned the building. According to the 1916 city directory, the storefront was occupied by the Kappaz Market, Nicholas Kbloz owner. The market remained in this location into the early 1970s. Nicholas Kbloz (aka Kabaz/Kappaz) was succeeded by George Kappaz in the early 1960s. Nicholas Kappaz lived above the store for many of those years during which time a brick addition was built at the rear of the market (1930). Nicholas Kappaz purchased the property from Amelia M. Stark in 1940. The building that makes up the second part of the current building was constructed in 1924 on Lot 11. In 1910, this lot was purchased from Elijah E. Bigelow by John B. Drexelius. Bigelow was the original purchaser of this lot and the lot next to it, Lot 12, when the land was subdivided by the J.S. Visger Land Co. in 1894.



Photo

Filename: East Jefferson\14507-19 East Jefferson.JPG
Roll: Frame:
View: north
Credit: Rebecca Savage
Caption: 14507-19 East Jefferson (pre-alterations)

Period of Significance:

Area of Significance:

- 1 Commerce
- 2
- 3

Arch/Builder: n/a

Date Built: c. 1915, 1924

State of Michigan Historic Preservation Office
Intensive Level Survey
Jefferson East Survey

In 1924 Samuel S. Kaplan and William P. Shoemaker purchased Lot 11 from Edward Burell who received the deed from Drexelius in 1915. Though not stated on the permit that was issued in 1924, it may be assumed that Kaplan and Shoemaker constructed the brick building on Lot 11. The building was to contain a store and an office. According to the 1925/26 city directory among the early tenants were J.L. McConachie, real estate, and W.C. Markham, construction, and the Yee Sing Laundry which, as the Hing Laundry, was still occupying the building in the mid-1960s. Attorneys, Megargle & Barrows, and Erie Rose leased space in the building from the early 1930s to late 1950s. According to the city records, the buildings on Lots 10 and 11 were combined in 1986 and their facades unified to appear as one building. The alley-facing rear walls of the East Jefferson Market reveal physical evidence of the original two buildings.

References:

Wayne County Registrar of Deeds. Detroit Building Permit #6671, 3/30/15 (Lot 10), #54052, 11/29/24 (Lot 11). Alterations: #33275A, 7/29/30, #30814, 2/11/86. Detroit city directories 1913 - 1974. George Kappaz: "East Siders Cry Foul Over Fox Creek Odor," "Detroit News," 9/17/60, 3A.

Surveyor's Comments:

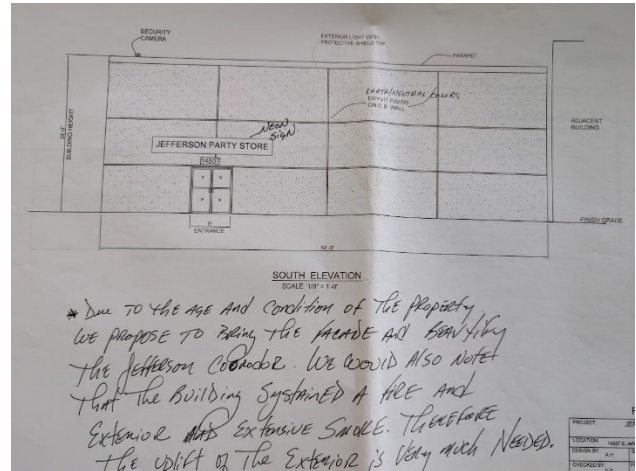
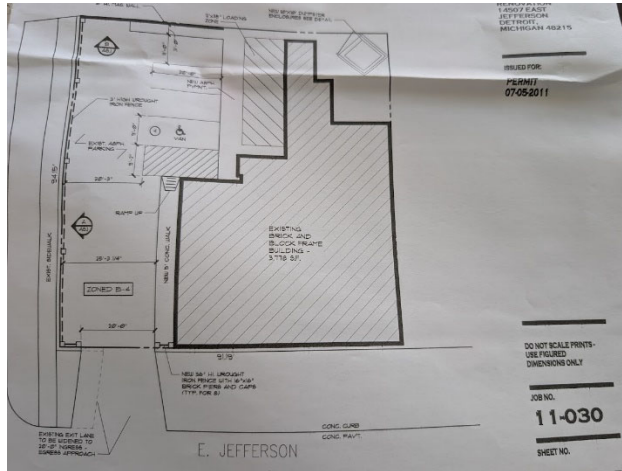
Deemed non-contributing in its current altered state. Considering the full history and physical evidence of the original buildings, it is hoped that the original facades have been merely covered and could one day be rediscovered and restored. This building would be eligible for consideration at such a time.



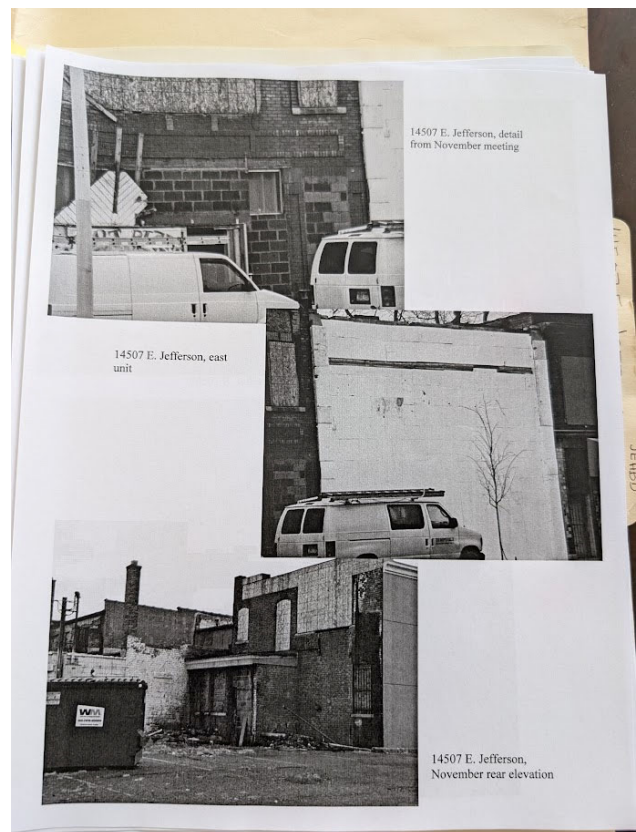
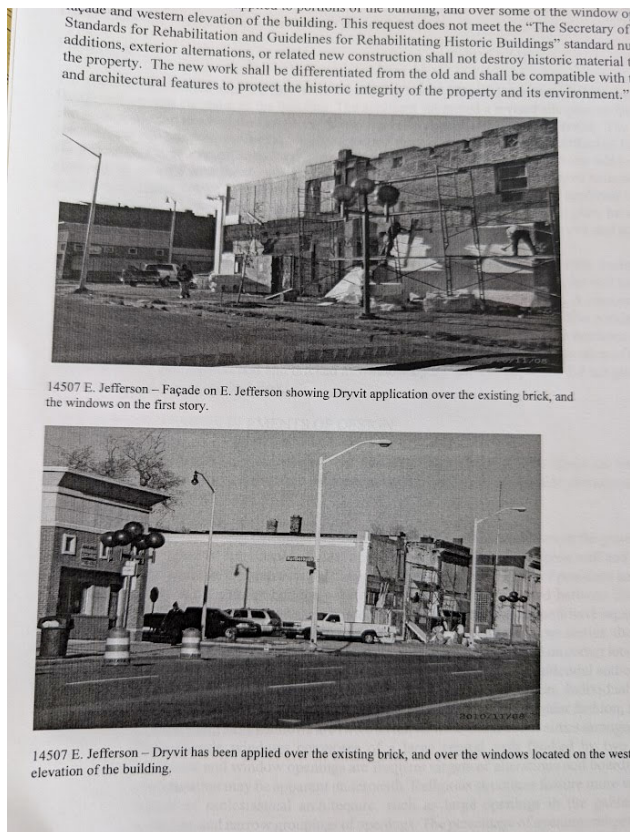
Google Street View image from August 2009, showing substantial fire damage to westernmost building. Note second story wall separating this building from the center building, apparently intact.

- Shortly after district designation, the westernmost building (at that time still referenced as 14507 East Jefferson, its historic address) suffered an apparently catastrophic fire removing the roof and most of the second floor. However, the structure was rebuilt (to an unknown extent) with no approvals from HDC, nor evidently a permit from BSEED. Additionally, a new EIFS/dryvit exterior cladding system, with garish and amateurish "classical" styling alien to the district's character, was added without approval. HDC staff identified the work in violation, which prompted an after-the-fact review by the Commission at the November/December 2010 Meetings. The proposed EIFS/dryvit cladding was denied by your body, yet was apparently never removed or remedied. A FOIA request from the building's owners was

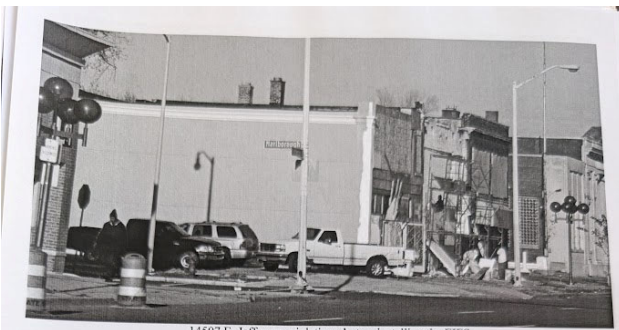
also received by staff during this period. The grayscale images below are from HDC records from 2010-11.



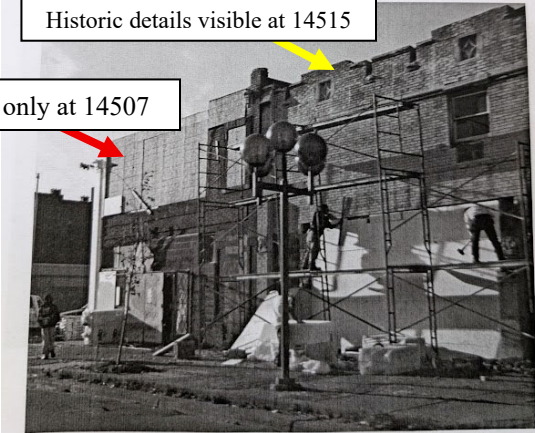
From HDC files, 2010-11: site plan showing single combined building, and one of several proposed EIFS façade systems.



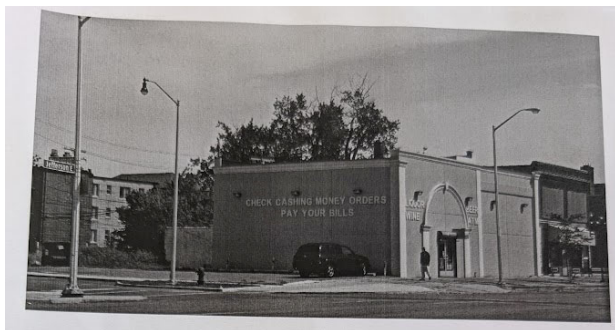
From HDC files, 2010-11: HDC staff photos of the work being performed in violation (installation of the EIFS/dryvit cladding system).



Historic details visible at 14515



Wood only at 14507



14507 E. Jefferson, present condition



55

From HDC files, 2010-11: HDC staff photos of the work performed in violation (installation of the EIFS/dryvit cladding system), and the final result. Note the apparent historic brick details exposed at the center building (14515), clearly visible in the lower left image (yellow arrow). Note also that the reconstruction of 14507 (westernmost building) did not apparently include the rebuilding of the brick front façade (red arrow), though some brick detail was still extant below this damaged area.

- It is important to note, as HDC staff did at the time, that historic brick details were exposed during the work performed in violation, confirming Ms. Savage's earlier analysis that such important architectural character may have survived the 1986 recladding. If the 2010 work in violation had not occurred (i.e., the completion without permit of the EIFS/Dryvit system), it is clear that substantial historic character could have been recovered at the center building (14515 East Jefferson), reclassifying it as a **contributing building** to the district. This observation has implications for the present application, since violations run with the property and remain the responsibility of the present owner.
- By 2013, the combined buildings were once again in operation as a liquor store. It is not clear if it was operating legally or if the work in violation had somehow gained approval subsequent to the HDC denial – our records do not show any approvals. By 2017, the store appears to be vacant, and by 2021, substantial degradation of the second floor is again evident, suggesting that the original fire repairs were cursory at best.
- For a resource (in this case, a building) to be contributing to a historic district, it must retain its historic **integrity**, which is defined by the National Park Service as *the ability of a property to convey its historical associations or attributes*. Integrity (again by federal law) is evaluated for any particular resource according to the following seven attributes: **location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association**. A resource with historic integrity, per the Commission's assessment, is a contributing resource. A non-contributing resource is a building in a district which does not retain its historic integrity (i.e., it fails to achieve all or most of the seven attributes). It is important to emphasize that the aspects of historic integrity is evaluated with respect to the conveyance of historical associations or attributes for which the historic district has been so designated. In our case, this is established via City Council's HDAB designation report, and the codified Elements of Design.



Google Street View image from September 2013, showing the store in operation with the incompatible EIFS/dryvit façade system.



Google Street View image from August 2021. At least four years after closing the store, the unapproved façade system has apparently collapsed at the side and at the front, revealing what appear to be haphazard repairs of the original damage from 2009.



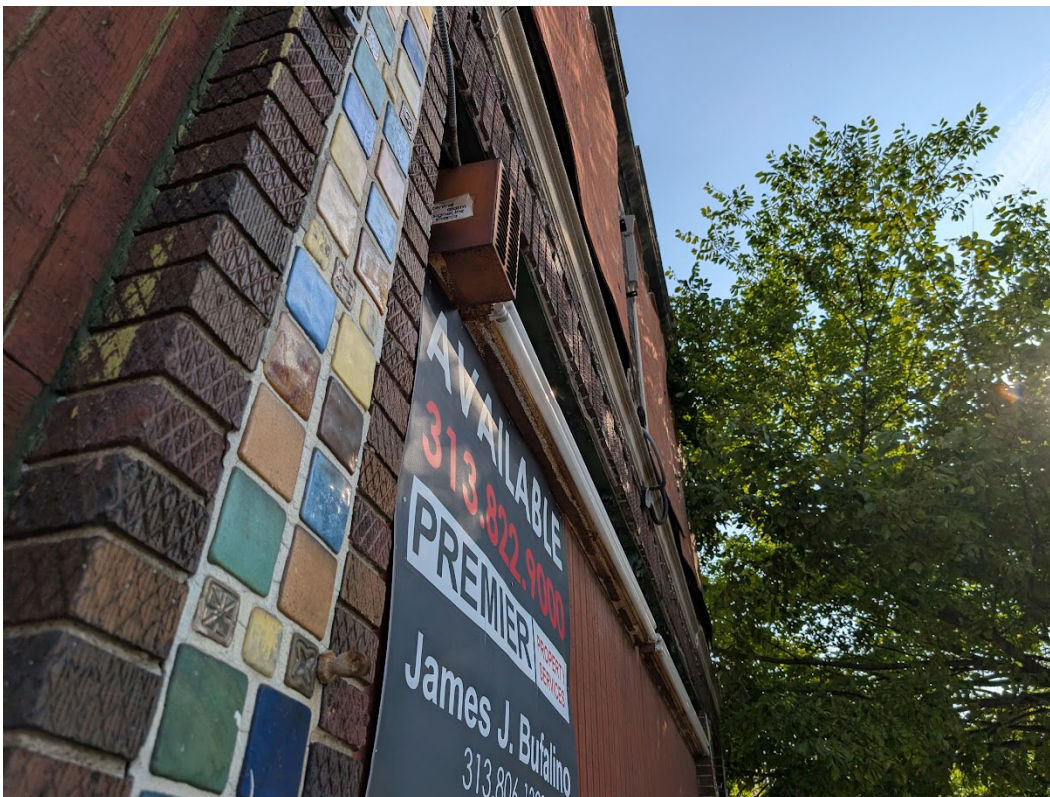
Current view towards the combined buildings, showing the remains of the incompatible cladding installed in violation in 2010.. Staff photo, July 24, 2025.

- The current application, then, is for the outright demolition of these two buildings (and also the third, easternmost building, discussed separately in the next section). Senior HDC staff architects undertook several visits to the property, including a visit with the owner/applicant on August 29th, at which the door to the 14507 (westernmost) building was opened.
- **14507 East Jefferson (westernmost half-building, now addressed as 14501)** Based on staff review of the submitted materials and our site visits, our analysis includes the following for the **westernmost building**, originally 14507 East Jefferson and now the western “half of the combined pair:
 - Due to widespread structural and architectural damage caused by at least one catastrophic fire and further deterioration in the years since, little to no historic integrity remains at the building. As such, staff recommends that it be considered a non-contributing resource to the district, with no ability to recover contributing status.
 - This building is beyond reasonable repair and staff assesses that it is eligible for demolition under a Certificate of Appropriateness. As discussed above, the structure suffered a major conflagration circa 2008 and was never properly repaired. It has further suffered neglect and decay since that time. There is currently no remaining roof structure of note, and the entire first floor diaphragm has collapsed into the basement. Large portions of the brick façade are missing or obviously compromised. Concerning the historic integrity of the easternmost building, separate from its condition, staff concludes there is little to none remaining. There is some historic brick still present, but it exists out of context. The entire second story has been lost.
- **14515 East Jefferson (central half-building, now addressed as 14501)** Based on staff review of the submitted materials and our site visits, our analysis includes the following for the **center building**, originally 14515 East Jefferson and now the eastern “half of the combined pair:
 - Staff does not find that the building, considered individually, has been documented to be beyond reasonable repair.
 - Additionally, staff is not convinced that the building has lost all of its historic integrity, based primarily on photographs in our archives showing historic features extant during the illegal construction of the dryvit façade in 2010. As such, staff recommends that the center building be

- considered a contributing resource to the district.
- However, it is clear that its legal 1986 connection to the easternmost building has opened it to decay. It likely shares structural and other building systems with its neighbor. Though not fully documented, it clearly must have also suffered smoke and fire damage. There is also the matter that an approved demolition of the easternmost building, but not this central building, will require construction to enclose the west wall previously opened to connect the two buildings.
 - The center building, based on the violation photos from 2010, almost certainly retains historic brick detailing at its front façade dating to the Period of Significance. As discussed above, the removal of the EIFS/Dryvit cladding system, installed in violation and without approval, should reveal this historic character. While the applicant has submitted a photo showing concrete block behind the dryvit, this small area of exploration (apparently at the 1st floor in the extreme left-side area of the former storefront) cannot serve to determine the nature of the entire façade, especially given the photographs in HDC files showing that large parts were intact at the 2nd story during the façade's installation.
 - Based on the points above, staff recommends that the Commission deny the current application for demolition of the central building, pending the following actions, which will qualify it for further demolition review by your body per the Commission's Rules of Procedure:
 - Receipt of additional documentation (photos, videos, walk-thrus) of the building showing condition, and status of structural/systems and their interdependence with the westernmost building
 - Removal of the illegally installed EIFS cladding to determine status of historic brick behind it, which will lead to a clear analysis of historic integrity/contributing status.

14521 EAST JEFFERSON (THE THIRD, EASTERNMOST BUILDING)

- The third, easternmost building under discussion is completely separate from the discussion concerning the combined pair of buildings to the west. There is no indication that any of the damage, illegal work, or interbuilding complexities present at the other buildings/parcel have any affect on this property.



Detail view of the brown brick/stone façade of 14521 East Jefferson Staff photo, July 24, 2025.

- Similar to Ms. Savage’s field survey of the previous combined building, this separate building was surveyed circa 2008 for the National Register. Her report found this building, erected circa 1926, to be a **contributing resource** to the district, and is provided below in its entirety. Note that the appearance and apparent condition of the building has changed very little from the historic era. Key observations from the field survey include:
 - The intact historic brown brick used at the primary facade, embossed with a distinctive cross-hatch pattern.
 - The intact original openings for the storefront window at the lower level, and the apartment windows at the upper level. Ornamental stonework or cast stone is present at window openings and at the cornice.
 - The likelihood that the inset tiles on the façade are from Pewabic Pottery, though they may not date to the Period of Significance.



Detail view of the second story facade of 14521 East Jefferson. Note intact cast stone and ornamental brick. Staff photo, September 26, 2025.

**State of Michigan Historic Preservation Office
Intensive Level Survey
Jefferson East Survey**

Address

Street: 14521 E Jefferson ZIP 48215-
City: Detroit County: Wayne
Current Name: White Sun Chop Suey
Historic Name: The White Sun Cafe

Evaluations

Contributes to:
NR Eligible: NR Eligible
Contributing: Contributing Site
SHPO Evaluation:

Resources on Property/Status

Historic Use: COMMERCE/TRADE (CT)
Current Use: VACANT/NOT IN USE
Owner Type: Private

Main Building

Foundation

1. Brick
2. Stone
- 3.

Wall:

1. Brick
2. Ceramic Tile
- 3.

Roof:

1. N/A
- 2.
- 3.

Other:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Period of Significance:

Area of Significance:

- 1 Commerce
- 2 Architecture
- 3

Arch/Builder: J. Oldenkamp, builder

Date Built: c. 1926

Architectural Classification: Commercial Style

Material Notes:

The exposed surfaces of the brick used on the facade are scored in a cross-hatch pattern. Based on the glazes, the shapes, and the colors of the tiles, it is likely that the tiles used on the facade originated from the Pewabic Pottery in Detroit.

Description:

14521 East Jefferson is a two-story brick building with a rectangular footprint. It is considered a two-part commercial block with a single story lower zone at street level consisting of storefront space and a single story upper level consisting of offices/residential space above. The symmetrically arranged facade is composed of two large window openings on the second floor that have stone sills and label moulding. The openings are now covered; it is likely that each window opening contained a grouping of three windows. The ground floor is composed of a center doorway flanked by single window openings under a fabric awning bearing the name of the restaurant. The entrance to the upstairs spaces is at the west end of the facade; the opposite end has an elevated window opening with a sill and gable-shaped hood in cast stone. The front wall of the ground floor sits slightly behind four brick piers that enframe the facade, flanking the window and doorway on the ends of the building. In what appears to be a later application, panels are inset with colored decorative tiles that have been installed along the length of the piers and outlining the bottom panels of the original storefront windows, now covered. A stone capstone, cornice and stringcourse are complemented by cast stone blocks at the foundation.

Other Buildings/Features:

Significant Persons:

Statement of Significance

The building permit was issued in 1926 to J. Oldenkamp, a local real estate developer, for the construction of a two-story brick structure with dimensions of 30 x 70 to contain a restaurant, four offices and one apartment. The cost was estimated at \$13,400. According to the 1927/28 city directory, the restaurant, The White Sun Cafe, occupied the ground floor space. Chow Y(ee) Leon, was the proprietor. Taylor & Trimble and Miller & Company, real estate agencies, the Stuart Letter Shop, and F.C. Moeller, a contractor, occupied the second floor offices. The White Sun Cafe was



Photo

Filename: East Jefferson\14521 East Jefferson.JPG

Roll: **Frame:**

View: north

Credit: Rebecca Savage

Caption: 14521 E. Jefferson

State of Michigan Historic Preservation Office
Intensive Level Survey
Jefferson East Survey

still occupying the same location in 1974; directories had listed the proprietor as Ben C. Leong, Bennie Leon, and Ben C. Leon, either the same person or a member of Chow Y. Leon's family. According to city directories, Mr. Leon lived above the restaurant during the 1930s and still resided there in the early 1970s. The White Sun Cafe changed to White Sun Chop Suey after 1974 and continued to operate under that name until late 2000 when the restaurant closed. According to a member of the Leong family, "White Sun" is a translation of the name of the village in southern China from which Chow Yee Leon(g) and many subsequent family members came. This building appeared in the film "8 Mile" in 2002.

References:

Detroit Building Permit #16439, 8/31/26. Detroit city directory 1927/28 - 1974.

Surveyor's Comments:

Contributes to the proposed historic designation of the Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business District

- The 2008 HDAB designation report notes the specific architectural character of this "historic business district," of which 14521 East Jefferson is clearly a contributing example:
 - *Most of the buildings front onto East Jefferson and fill the lot line with no setback from the street, resulting in a nearly continuous streetscape. The buildings are generally two-stories high, with the exception of the churches and apartment buildings.*
 - *The Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business District is one of the few remaining commercial districts that reflect commercial architecture and suburban development on the east side of Detroit during the 1920s. The majority of the structures on East Jefferson Avenue are multiple-storefront blocks, generally two stories in height, containing offices or apartments on the second story.*
 - *Because real estate was in high demand during Detroit's explosive early twentieth-century growth, most structures were built to their lot lines and shared party walls with the buildings next to them. This creates an unbroken wall of storefronts on East Jefferson Avenue. The commercial buildings are of brick construction with cast stone trim, in the commercial style used in the first half of the twentieth Century. Most structures on East Jefferson Avenue have decorative brickwork and regularly spaced window openings along with decorative features at their cornices or parapets.*
- This building, 14521 East Jefferson, is specifically described in the body of the HDAB designation report. It was built in 1926 by Jerry Oldenkamp, a prominent commercial builder in Jefferson-Chalmers who had offices nearby at 14320 East Jefferson, opposite the Lakewood Theatre. Its original 1920s commercial tenant, White Sun Café (later White Sun Chop Suey), survived into the early 21st century. It is unlikely that the building has ever had a second tenant.
- 14521 East Jefferson is further documented as a contributing building to the district, and has its own dedicated architectural description in the City Council/HDAB designation report, as such:
 - *14521 East Jefferson - White Sun Chop Suey - Two-story, two bay brick commercial building, 1926, Jerry Oldenkamp, builder. The symmetrically arranged façade displays two large window openings on each story. The openings are now covered but it is likely that each opening contained a grouping of windows. A string course of cast stone separates the first and second stories. Dark red brick work was set in square patterns on the lower level above the bulkhead. The first floor has been ornamented with a more recent addition of multicolored ceramic tiles - most likely Pewabic - inset into brick piers, as well as into the patterns below the windows on the first floors. A projecting neon sign of the 1950s era is centered between the second story windows. This building's exterior was in the film 8 Mile in 2002.*
- Further attestation to the **significant historic character of 14521 East Jefferson** is found in the Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business District's Elements of Design, the codified (Section 21-2-204) summary of features significant to the district's appearance, which the Commission is compelled to

preserve. The Commission should recognize that many of these significant elements are present in the design of this building. These include:

- **Element 1, Height.** Buildings in the district range from one to 4½ stories...
- **Element 2, Proportion of building's front façade.** Most individual buildings are wider than tall...where contributing buildings are situated on corner lots, their visible side elevations are generally wider than tall.
- **Element 3, Proportion of openings within the façade.** Storefront windows on the ground floor are generally composed of large panes of glass above a low brick or concrete apron wall and beneath a horizontal sign panel and/or transom. Entrance openings occupy a variety of positions among the storefronts; some of the smaller buildings feature a single doorway recessed between the angled faces of the flanking display windows, while wider façades with more storefronts have separate entrances to each store. Storefront and window openings are frequent targets of alterations and boarding, but their original configuration may be apparent underneath... The percentage of openings ranges from 35 percent to 60 percent of the front façade areas of contributing buildings.
- **Element 4, Rhythm of solids to voids in the front façade.** Openings within the façades are generally regularly arranged, horizontally by floor and vertically by bay, due to the Classical-stylistic derivation of most of the buildings and/or their steel frame and curtain wall construction. Where buildings with similar arrangements abut, the horizontal flow extends to the next building. A rhythm of storefronts at ground level adds to the flow of the buildings on the street level.
- **Element 5, Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets.** Where buildings abut each other along East Jefferson Avenue, the continuous flow of the streetscape is broken rhythmically only by the intersection of side streets. Where gaps exist because of building demolition, that rhythm is broken.
- **Element 6, Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.** Where entrances are recessed between two display windows, or are spaced evenly between multiple storefronts, a strong rhythm is created. The placement of original entrances is not consistent, depending on the number of retail spaces entered from the street.
- **Element 7, Relationship of materials.** The major materials in the district are brick and cast stone. Other major materials include limestone, ashlar, ceramic tile, and structural glass. Face brick on fronts of buildings often extends into the side elevations but changes to common brick for the majority of the sides and rear...
- **Element 8, Relationship of textures.** A variety of textural relationships exist in the district, the most common being textured or pressed brick with mortar joints juxtaposed to cast stone trim. The Art Deco styling of several of the buildings is manifested by zigzag, diamond, chevron, and other patterns of brick. ... In general, the district is rich in textural interest.
- **Element 9, Relationship of colors.** Natural brick colors, red, beige, yellow, orange, brown and buff, and beige limestone, are major façade colors in the district. Light cast stone trim provides contrast to the darker materials. The use of contrasting brick also results in colorful patterns. Color applied to window frames, sash, and mullions range from green, brown, gray, putty and black. Ceramic tile, usually green, gray slate roofs on religious buildings, and red Spanish tile on the slopes of parapet walls, where they exist, add significantly to the color relationships in the district.
- **Element 10, Relationship of architectural details.** The district features commercial buildings dating from the second three decades of the 20th Century. Characteristics of this period of American architecture are references to Classical or Medieval styles, but also Art Deco and Moderne...Parapet walls of commercial buildings lining East Jefferson Avenue, with their various designs that include upward projections at their corners, raised pediments, and decorative cresting, create variety at the roofline and an interesting silhouette along the streetscape. ...
- **Element 11, Relationship of roof shapes.** Most roofs in the district are flat and, therefore, generally not visible from the street...
- **Element 12, Walls of continuity.** Walls of continuity are created by the continuous flow of abutting buildings along the front lot lines. This continuity is broken where buildings have been demolished...

- **Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.** *The major surface directly in front of buildings facing East Jefferson Avenue is the recently improved wide concrete sidewalk with rows of brick pavers, which extend from the concrete curb to the building line. ...*
- **Element 14, Relationship of open space to structures.** *Open space generally exists in the form of public right-of-way in the front of buildings on East Jefferson Avenue and the side when the building is on a corner lot, such as the sidewalk and street. ... Where the upper part of the brick side elevation of a building is visible, an old painted advertising sign may still be extant.*
- **Element 15, Scale of façade and façade elements.** *The scale of façade elements is appropriate to the style and size of the building and ranges greatly from building to building...*
- **Element 16, Directional expression of front elevation.** *Most front elevations express horizontally, an impression reinforced by the repetition of similar storefronts along the street and the low height of the buildings. The buildings, when taken in sections, form short but unbroken horizontal streetscapes...*
- **Element 17, Rhythm of building setbacks.** *A consistency of building setback is created, except where demolition has occurred, due to the siting of the buildings on the front lot lines along East Jefferson Avenue.*
- **Element 18, Relationship of lot coverages.** *Buildings on corner lots often occupy most of their entire parcels, with smaller buildings in the middle of the blocks occupying far less of their parcels. The percentage of lot coverage is approximately 35 percent to 100 percent.*
- **Element 19, Degree of complexity within the façade.** *The degree of complexity ranges from the simple to moderately complex. Arrangements of windows, elements and details, within, are regular and repetitive in nature.*
- **Element 20, Orientation, vistas, overviews.** *The primary orientation is towards East Jefferson Avenue, except when buildings are located on side streets, which they are oriented towards... The wide, uninterrupted sweep of East Jefferson Avenue lined with buildings of fairly uniform heights results in a consistent but varied silhouette.*
- **Element 21, Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.** *While most building façades above the first story are symmetrical, the district as a whole is asymmetrical in appearance due to the difference in architectural treatments and varied number of storefronts.*
- **Element 22, General environmental character.** *The Jefferson-Chalmers Business Historic District is a low-scale, mixed-use neighborhood commercial district that maintains a high degree of integrity but faces increasing pressures from redevelopment and lack of physical maintenance. With viable residential areas towards the Detroit River, and the waterway and riverfront parks as major assets, the district has potential to grow into a gateway that complements that of the Grosse Pointes.*
- Clearly, in reviewing the above code language, demolition of the contributing building would not conform to preservation of the significant commercial features identified in the Elements of Design, Section 21-2-204, which are overwhelmingly concerned with historic storefronts, two-story buildings, zero-lot line setbacks, pressed brick, cast stone, and window arrangements as found on 14521 East Jefferson.
- Staff analysis of 14521 East Jefferson is based on our field visits, photos, and reports provided by the applicant and their engineer. As described in the Sarkisian report identified above, the structural engineer states the following regarding the structural brick walls:
 - *Reconstruction of the roof requires structurally sound and stable exterior walls, which do not exist.*
 - *The exterior walls are not structurally sound and are unstable in the current condition.*
- The below images show the subject exterior wall visible at this building (to the east). Though cracks in the cementitious overcoat are apparent, and some of this coating has detached from the brick, staff does not agree that the brick wall is unstable or in any compelling manner different than a typical 100-year old brick commercial building. Further documentation or clarity should be provided to support the engineering conclusions, in staff's opinion.



Above and below: east-facing structural side wall at 14521 East Jefferson Staff photos, July 24, 2025.



- Staff was not able to inspect the interior of this building during our visits to the property, other than peering into the locked doorway. We noted intact walls and floors, and small areas of daylight above suggesting some degree of roof failure. The applicant subsequently followed up with the images below, available in full resolution on the website. The view is apparently of the rear half of the building, looking towards the rear. A partial area of floor collapse is visible, with greater destruction apparent in the single-story portions of the building extending towards the alley (those areas in sunshine). If this is the greatest area of damage found in the building, the main mass of the building is repairable, in staff's opinion. Many historic preservation projects begin from a point of much higher deterioration than this:



Applicant's interior photos of rear of 14521-523 (easternmost) building submitted to staff.

- The building retains a high degree of historic integrity, when evaluated under the seven aspects described earlier in this report. It embodies the architectural character of the Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business District via its brick and stone façade, which dates to the Period of Significance. It is not clear if any of the original windows/storefronts exist behind the boarding; if not, compatible installations can be specified under NPS Standards and Guidelines.
- The Commission is required to use the Standards of Review specified by city code and state statute. Staff has presented above the distinctive historic character and features still extant on 14521 East Jefferson, and shown this building to be a contributing structure at designation and today. Two of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards are most relevant to demolition proposals:

Standard 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

Staff analysis: Demolition would not retain and preserve historic character. The historic integrity of the property would be erased. Demolition would remove all historic materials and alter all the features that characterize this property.

Standard 5: Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship

that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

Staff analysis: Demolition would not preserve the distinctive features, finishes and examples of craftsmanship that characterize this historic property.

- The above Standards, per 36 CFR 67.7, are to be applied to specific reviews in a “reasonable manner,” taking into account “economic and technical feasibility.” There is no compelling documentation in the applicant’s submission that it is unreasonable to maintain and ultimately rehabilitate this contributing historic building. Standards of review for “undue financial hardship” under a Notice to Proceed are steep, and have been described in an earlier section of this report for the Commission’s information.
- As laid out above via analysis of the Elements of Design, the demolition proposal fails to conform to Elements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22. (all of them)
- As such, staff must conclude and recommend to the Commission that the proposed demolition is contrary to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and the district’s Elements of Design, does not qualify for a Notice-to-Proceed, and must therefore be denied.

ISSUES

14507 East Jefferson (westernmost half-building, now addressed as 14501)

- No issues with the demolition proposal for this structure. The building is demonstrably beyond reasonable repair, and has minimal historic integrity.
- As a non-contributing building, its demolition under the Standards can be appropriate, as the historic character of the district is unaffected.
- Recommendation is to **Approve COA**

14515 East Jefferson (central half-building, now addressed as 14501)

- Adequate documentation establishing the building’s deteriorated condition, and status of structural/systems and their interdependence with the westernmost building, is not in evidence.
- The illegally installed EIFS cladding should be fully removed to determine status of historic brick behind it, which will lead to a clear analysis of historic integrity/contributing status.
- Recommendation is to **Deny** the application for demolition, pending possible receipt of additional data

14521 East Jefferson (third, easternmost building on its own parcel)

- This is plainly a contributing building to the historic district exhibiting extant historic features aligned with the architectural character and appearance codified by City Council as significant to the district. The removal of this building will directly and negatively impact the historic district.
- The standards for review compel its preservation.
- Recommendation is to **Deny** the application for demolition

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

Recommendation 1 of 2, Denial: Demolition of center building (14515 East Jefferson, now addressed as 14501, eastern half) and easternmost building (14521 East Jefferson).

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Jefferson-Chalmers Historic Business District’s Elements of Design, specifically:

Standard 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

Standard 5: Distinctive features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

And Elements of Design 1-22.

For the following reasons:

14515 East Jefferson (central half-building, now addressed as 14501)

- Adequate documentation establishing the building's deteriorated condition, and status of structural/systems and their interdependence with the westernmost building, is not in evidence.
- Evidence exists in HDC records that the building may retain historic character beneath the illegally installed dryvit façade, making the building a potentially contributing resource to the historic district.
- The building has not been demonstrated to be beyond economic and technically feasible repair, nor does its demolition satisfy any of the conditions necessary to issue a Notice to Proceed.

14521 East Jefferson (third, easternmost building on its own parcel)

- This is a contributing building to the historic district exhibiting extant historic features aligned with the architectural character and appearance codified by City Council as significant to the district. The removal of this building will directly and negatively impact the historic district.
- The building has not been demonstrated to be beyond economic and technically feasible repair, nor does its demolition satisfy any of the conditions necessary to issue a Notice to Proceed.

Recommendation 2 of 2, Certificate of Appropriateness: Demolition of westernmost building (14501 East Jefferson, western half only).

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Jefferson-Chalmers Historic District's Elements of Design, as the building is a non-contributing resource beyond economic and technically feasible repair.