

**STAFF REPORT: DECEMBER 10, 2025 MEETING**

**PREPARED BY: E. THACKERY**

**APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00674**

**ADDRESS: 761 WHITMORE**

**HISTORIC DISTRICT: PALMER PARK APARTMENT BUILDINGS LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**APPLICANT: KEVIN M. BRANDON**

**PROPERTY OWNER: PALMER PARK APARTMENTS LP**

**DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11/17/25**

**DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11/24/25**

**SCOPE: ERECT A TRASH ENCLOSURE, ERECT A FENCE, INSTALL AIR CONDITIONER UNITS, AND MINOR SITE ALTERATIONS**

### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

The apartment building at 761 Whitmore at the southeast corner of Whitmore Road and Third Avenue was historically known as the Rosemor Apartments and was built in 1948. According to the HDAB report for the district's designation, the building was designed by Wiedmaier and Gay, who had once designed many of the eclectic apartment buildings of the 1920s in Palmer Park, and was, by the 1940s, designing Modernistic buildings like this one. The two-and-a-half-story building is an irregularly shaped, garden court apartment building of light-colored brick. The Historic District Commission approved a new roof, gutters, and downspouts in 2019 and new vinyl windows and new entry doors were installed at that time without approval. In 2023, applied exterior muntins were approved to remedy the window violation, and the historic doorways were approved to be rebuilt. Those remedies are in the building permitting process under review.



*761 Whitmore Road at the southeast corner of Whitmore Road and Third Avenue. Shown are the north and west sides of the building. The low porch enclosures toward the left of the photo (along Whitmore) at the building's northeast corner is a repeated and historic, character-defining feature. The courtyard opens midway down the building's west facade, along Third, where a chain link fence currently stands. Proposed is a 6-foot-high black steel fence near the sidewalk along Whitmore and Third with gates where there are building entrances. Air conditioning units are proposed for installation in front of the apartments along Whitmore. (Staff photo, November 2025)*



*Designation photo, 2012. As compared with its current appearance, the building had a lighter-colored asphalt shingle roof and its former windows had light brown trim and more transparent glass. Shallow lawns along both Whitmore and Third are evident, where fences are proposed.*



*Aerial view of 761 Whitmore from Detroit Parcel Viewer. Shallow lawns are along the building's north and west sides and the courtyard with a large tree is visible along the west side. To the south (adjacent to the alley) and along some of the building's east side is concrete.*





*North side of 761 Whitmore, along Whitmore. The door centered here was replaced without approval and will be replaced with a rebuilt entry door that matches the historic design. The low porch walls toward the northeast corner are historic, character-defining features of the building. The chimneys that were visible in the designation photo have since been replaced with short, metal exhaust pipes. Air conditioning units and a 6-foot-high black fence are proposed along Whitmore. (Staff photo, November 2025)*



*761 Whitmore, building volume at the northwest corner. (Staff photo, November 2025) Note the narrow strip of grass between the building and the sidewalk where a 6-foot-high black fence is proposed.*





*761 Whitmore, west side of the building, along Third. The northern portion of the building's west side is to the left of the photo, the courtyard is at the center, and the southern portion of the west side is visible to the right of the photo. The entranceway visible here will be replaced with an entranceway that matches the historic design. The proposed black fence would have a gate across the walkway to the building entrances. (Staff photo, November 2025)*



*761 Whitmore, west side of the building, along Third. The building's volume at the northwest corner is to the left of the photo, the courtyard is at the center, and the volume toward the southwest corner is visible to the right of the photo. The entranceway visible here will be replaced with an entranceway that matches the historic design. A 6-foot-tall black fence is proposed near the edge of the grass along the sidewalk, with a gate across the entry walkway. (Staff photo, November 2025)*





*761 Whitmore, west side of the building along Third. Shown is the building's southernmost portion of the west side. Two of the historic, character-defining porches are visible as is the shallow lawn where a fence is proposed. (Staff photo, November 2025)*



*761 Whitmore, building's southwest corner from the south looking north toward Whitmore. A low-walled raised porch with a patio under it, below grade, is visible, and the narrowness of the strip of grass along Third is evident. A 6-foot-high black fence is proposed to enclose this grass strip and run northward to the corner at Third Avenue. The concrete at the bottom of the photo is the alley, and the concrete parking lot for the building is visible just off the alley, next to the building. (Staff photo, November 2025)*





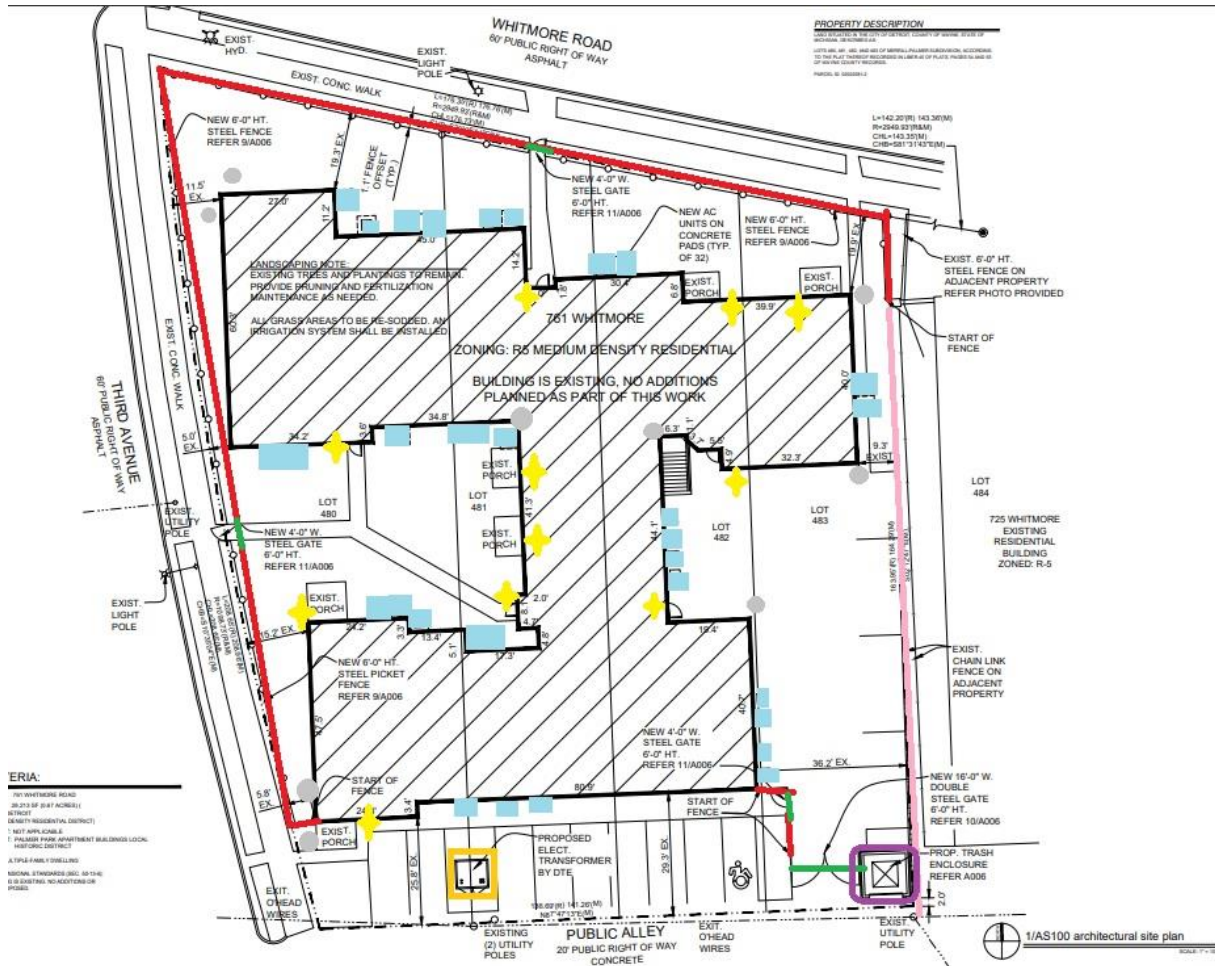
*761 Whitmore, south side of the building is shown from the alley. The concrete lot off the alley is pictured here. The proposed transformer will be positioned between the building and the two utility poles shown. No fence is proposed along the building's south side. (Staff photo, November 2025)*



*761 Whitmore, the building's southeast corner is to the left, a driveway runs along the east side of the building, and the concrete pad shown to the right (east) is where the proposed trash enclosure will be erected. A black steel double gate is proposed to be installed approximately from the rear of the concrete pad across the driveway. Three parking spots are planned in that gated area. (Staff photo, November 2025)*

## PROPOSAL

- Erect a trash enclosure
- Erect a six-foot-tall, black steel picket fence with three pedestrian gates and one vehicle gate, all matching in design with the proposed fence
- Install air conditioner units
- Install a DTE transformer
- Install exterior light fixtures
- Install security lights and security cameras (retroactive approval; already installed)



Gray: Security lights and cameras  
Pale blue: Air conditioning units  
Yellow star: Exterior light fixture  
Purple: Trash enclosure

Gold: DTE transformer  
Red: Proposed 6' black steel picket fence  
Green: Proposed gates  
Pink: Existing chain link fence

*Proposed conditions, plan provided by applicant and color-coded by staff*





*Proposed (installed) security lights and cameras and proposed air conditioning units (24"x24" x 33" or 36" tall)*



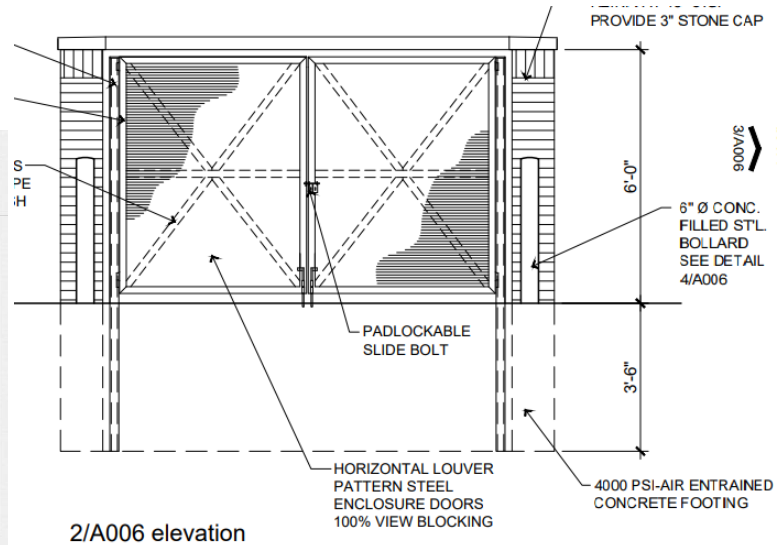
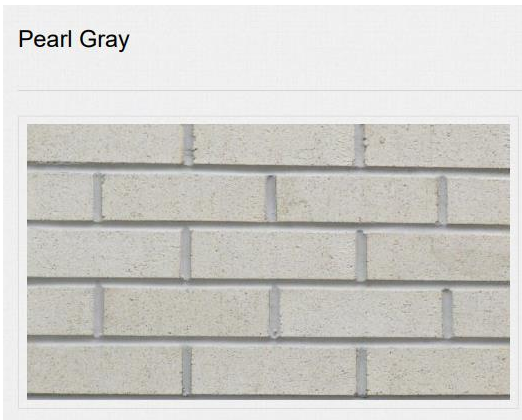
*Proposed exterior light fixture for entries and porches. (10.5" tall, 5" deep and wide, plus backplate and extension.)*



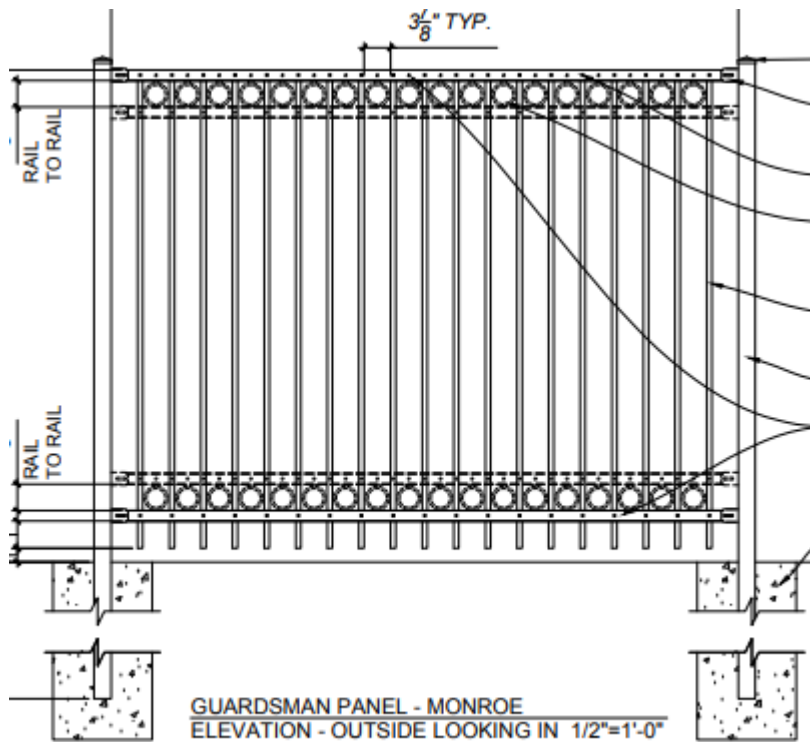
*Typical DTE transformer (proposed)*

*All product images from applicant's materials.*





*Proposed trash enclosure: Concrete block wall with pearl gray brick facing to match building, 6' tall with a 3" stone cap, steel enclosure doors with louvers, and 3' 6" concrete footings.*



*Proposed fencing and gates: Black 6-foot-high steel fence proposed for north and west sides of property, along shallow grass lawns, with matching gates for walkways to entries and matching double gate for driveway near southeast corner of building.*

## STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Palmer Park Apartment Buildings Local Historic District was designated in 2012.
- Staff has the authority to approve **exterior light fixtures, security lights and cameras, and the transformer**. The application includes all of these elements, in addition to scope items that must be

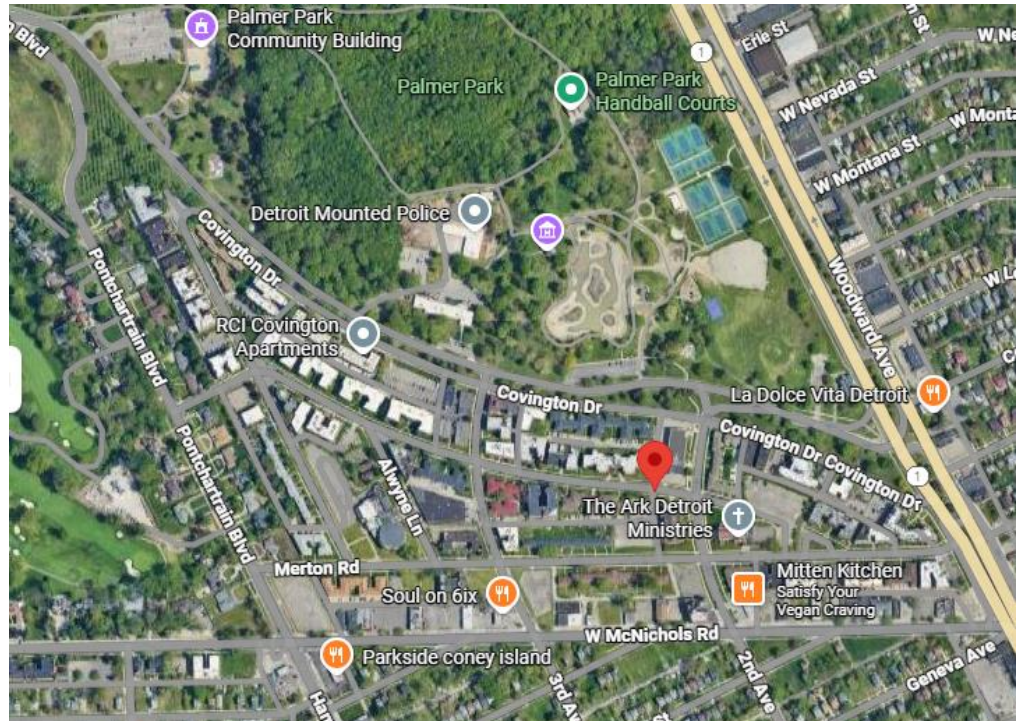
reviewed by the Commission. All scope items associated with this application have been forwarded to this body for review because the timing of the application and meeting did not allow for the items to be separated into two applications. Staff believes the proposed exterior light fixtures, security lights and cameras, and transformer are compatible with the building and meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the district's Elements of Design and would recommend approval for these four items.

- Regarding the **trash enclosure**, staff believes that it too meets the Standards and Guidelines and the Elements of Design. It is proposed to be constructed of a material that is compatible with the historic building's exterior cladding, is sufficiently subordinate to the historic building in scale, and will be placed at the rear of the parcel, in the most unobtrusive location the property offers.
- Staff has authority to approve air conditioning units and fencing in some situations.
  - Regarding the **air conditioning units**, the Commission issued a resolution in 2017 that gave staff the authority to approve air conditioning units if they are sited (1) "behind the building, OR (2)...on the side of the building (only if a rear location is not possible), and will be fully and continually screened by vegetation or a constructed screen wall, AND (3) the location and screening complies with the requirements as set forth in the city's zoning ordinance." The air conditioning units proposed here would be located in the highly visible yard along Whitmore and prominently lining the courtyard visible from Third, both without screening. Staff believes that in this setting where the property boundary is tight to the building's footprint, these highly visible air conditioning units in these prominent locations would diminish the historic character of the building.
  - Regarding the **fencing**, staff notes that the City's Fence and Hedge Guidelines were intended for staff review for smaller-scale residential properties, not large-scale multifamily properties like this one. Separately, staff has authority under Resolution 20-03 to approve "new fences no taller than 7 feet in height, if no historic fence is present." This is such a fence, so staff researched the potential appropriateness of the proposed fence as required for staff approval. Staff looked first to the Historic Designation Advisory Board's (HDAB's) designation report for the district and to the neighborhood itself to understand context.
    - HDAB's designation report describes that "Residential development began in Palmer Park during the mid-1920s. Influenced by the suburban housing trend of the period, the neighborhood was laid out with gently curving streets on large parcels of land. Apartment buildings, designed by prominent Detroit architects to accommodate middle- and upper-middle-class residents, were built throughout the neighborhood."
      - The report continues, "The standards set by the FHA (the Federal Housing Administration) promoted economical and efficient architectural designs for housing that coincided with the popularity of European Modernism and the Art Moderne. The richly detailed designs of the 1920s were replaced by designs with clean strong lines, large windows, flat roofs, and plain wall surfaces."
      - Additionally, the report describes how, following the second World War, "garden apartment" projects were developed in the 1940s. The report states, "These new apartment buildings were typically two- and three-story, multiple-family structures. They were built in a variety of plans ranging from simple, repetitive townhouses to u-shape, set-back buildings with garden court apartments. Guided by FHA standards, the units were arranged to afford privacy, sunlight, and fresh air."
      - The report continues, "Development was interrupted during the Great Depression and again during World War II, but increased dramatically in the later 1940s. Many new apartment buildings inspired by the American Garden Movement were designed for Palmer Park. Commercial buildings were located on the periphery of the neighborhood along the north side of McNichols Road and religious structures were built in the heart of the neighborhood. This newer development is significant to the district as an example of a high-density urban



community developing according to the popular suburban planning concepts of the period.”

The large lots and curving streets, along with sidewalks and lawns, indeed tend to impart a suburban feeling to the neighborhood.



*Google satellite view shows the district's curvilinear streets and its relationship to the Park.*

- In looking to the context of the district and the immediate neighborhood around the subject property, staff analyzed the district. The majority of properties, both immediately near 761 Whitmore and a little further afield around the small district, do not include perimeter fencing. (Staff is defining “perimeter fencing” as continuous fencing, with or without gates, identifying the property line along the public right-of-way.) Fencing around side yards and parking lots is quite common, but full-perimeter fencing is not, as shown in the **photos appended to the end of** this report.
  - The majority of properties in the district do not have perimeter fencing around them. Some properties use low shrubs along the sidewalk to create a low hedge from the sidewalk.
  - As a general rule, full or almost-full perimeter fencing around a property, especially at a 6’ height and especially on a corner, is not the typical pattern in this district.
  - There are, however, two instances of perimeter fencing in the neighborhood of 761 Whitmore. The property immediately to the east (725 Whitmore) and a property four buildings to the east and across the street (660 Whitmore) both have full perimeter fencing around their properties. Neither is on a corner, as 761 Whitmore is. (Please see the photos below the “Recommendations” section.) Unity Temple, at the corner of Whitmore and Second (17505 Second), has its parking lots fenced in, but the front of the church is unfenced.
    - Regarding 725 Whitmore, the subject property’s immediate neighbor to the east, staff notes that it is an older building than the subject property

and is a taller, more traditional, more symmetrical building with a more formal relationship with its lot. Its perimeter fence is not historic but is designed to look similar to a historic, wrought-iron fence. Staff notes that this fence style, and perhaps this fence placement along the sidewalk, may be appropriate for 725 Whitmore, but may not be for 761 Whitmore. The Modernist, lower-slung, garden-style apartment buildings like 761 Whitmore, which are scattered throughout the district, have a different appearance and a different relationship with their lots than higher-style, more formal apartment buildings do. The garden-style apartments tend to be only a few stories tall, have an irregular footprint, and they tend to sprawl across their lot. A perimeter fence at one property does not mean that a similar fence at another property would be appropriate, even if the properties are adjacent to one another.

- In the larger district, just as a sampling, along **Covington**, 303 Covington has a fence along the sidewalk, 333 Covington has their parking lots fenced in, the next two complexes have no fencing, Unity Temple has their parking lots fenced in, and the next five complexes have no fencing. Derby Gardens Apartments at Covington and Third has their sideyard and courtyard fenced in, but the front of their property along Third has no fencing. A large complex has perimeter fencing, and 1001 Covington Drive does not, but it has its sideyard fenced in. The lawn here is deep, however, so the fence sits back a good distance from the sidewalk. A long stretch of townhomes/duplexes does not have fencing along the sidewalk. Along **Whitmore**, from Ponchartrain, the apartment building at the corner of Whitmore and Manderson has no fencing, and the next five complexes on both the north and south sides of the street have no fencing. Along **Merton** from Ponchartrain, a parking lot is fenced in, and then an apartment complex, a religious building, and four apartment buildings all have no fencing. Near the corner of Merton and Alwyne Place, two apartment buildings have perimeter fencing—both buildings look vacant. Along **Manderson** from Covington, one complex has fencing along the rear, and a stretch of townhomes/duplexes has no fencing except around their parking lot, and two apartment buildings have no fence. Still on Manderson from Covington, but on the other side of the street, 10 buildings have no fencing, then there's a fenced-in parking lot, and an apartment building with no perimeter fence. Continuing on that side of the street, there's a fenced-in parking lot and then many townhomes (about 10) without fencing, and then an apartment building without fencing. In summary, of about 78 buildings in this portion of the district, about 5 had full-perimeter fencing as proposed at 761 Whitmore.
  - The majority of apartment buildings in the neighborhood and in the district do not have full-perimeter fencing as is proposed at 761 Whitmore.
  - Staff is not certain whether any of these fences are historic, but looking at the material and design of several of them, staff believes at least many of them to be contemporary additions to their sites. Staff notes them in this report as existing conditions in the district.
- At 761 Whitmore, for both the unscreened air conditioning units in prominent locations and the six-foot-high fence on such a compact property, staff looks to Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation Standard 2, along with the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, Building Site section. In addition, staff considers this district's Elements of Design.
    - Standard 2 states, "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 believes that introducing a 6-foot-high fence or unscreened air conditioning units between the building and the sidewalk would alter the space that characterizes this property.

- The Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings’ Building Site section includes this especially relevant guideline:
  - Not Recommended: Introducing a new building or site feature that is out of scale or of an otherwise inappropriate design.
- The Elements of Design as codified in Section 21-2-233 for this district, are important for understanding the features significant to the appearance. *Element 13, Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments*, does not mention the existence of historic perimeter fences, noting in part that, "Trees, hedges, and other landscaping features are significant, but vary from one building to the next. Trees in the front yards of buildings vary in size, age, and species. Apartment buildings typically feature flat, grassy front lawns, often bisected by concrete sidewalks. Alleys provide access to the rear of a majority of lots in the district. Most commercial buildings, and a smaller number of apartment buildings, are built up to the front lot line. Public sidewalks run alongside all streets in the district. Curbs, while historically stone, have been replaced with concrete in a much of the district. Covington Drive, with its broad median, is a significant landscape feature."
- In addition, specifically in regards to fencing, staff notes that, as mentioned previously, assessing the appropriateness of fence types and locations is very property-specific and is dependent on the building’s architectural style and footprint and its relationship to its lot and the street.

It is staff’s opinion that a six-foot-tall fence in front of this property along its two street sides introduces a new site feature that is out of scale and not contextually sensitive to the historic property and district, and that unscreened air conditioning units are inappropriate in public-facing spaces and front yards.

## ISSUES

- Installing a 6-foot-tall fence along the two street-facing sides of the property to enclose the narrow strips of grass on this property is not contextually sensitive to the rest of the historic property and district.
- Installing air conditioning units without screening in the highly visible yards along Whitmore and in the highly visible courtyard from Third Avenue will diminish the building’s historic character.

## RECOMMENDATION(S)

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

#### **Recommendation 1 of 2, Denial: Installation of a six-foot steel fence at the property’s perimeter along the Whitmore Road and Third Avenue frontages**

Staff recommends that the proposed six-foot fence installation at the property’s perimeter along Whitmore Road and Third Avenue will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Palmer Park Apartment Buildings Local Historic 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.*
- *Element of Design 13*

For the following reasons;

- This property is characterized in part by shallow yards along the two sides of the building, bounded by sidewalks. Installing a 6-foot-tall fence near the sidewalk along Whitmore Road and Third Avenue introduces a new site feature that: is out of scale with the building and site; diminishes the building's historic character; and alters the spaces that characterize the property, changing the building's relationship with the street and neighborhood.

**Recommendation 2 of 2, Certificate of Appropriateness: Remaining work items**

Staff recommends that the remaining proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Palmer Park Apartment Buildings Local Historic District's Elements of Design, with the condition that:

- All air conditioning units installed along Whitmore Road and in the courtyard along Third Avenue will be fully and continually screened by vegetation or a constructed screen wall, and the screening will be submitted to staff for review and approval.



### Context Photos of Near Neighbors to 761 Whitmore



Apartment building immediately to the south of 761 Whitmore, 17400 Third Avenue—the narrow strip of grass is unfenced.

Directly across Third Avenue from 17400 Third Ave is a vacant and deteriorating apartment building at Third and Merton that may have had a fire and has a full-perimeter fence. In this area, however, most of Merton's apartment buildings do not have perimeter fencing. (This full-perimeter fence was noted in the sample survey above.)

Directly across Third Avenue from 761 Whitmore is an auto shop and its lot is fenced in.



825 Whitmore Rd. Apartments directly across Third Avenue from 761 Whitmore's west side—there is no perimeter fencing. A survey driving west on Whitmore two blocks revealed no buildings with perimeter fencing.





811 Covington. Apartment building (Derby Gardens) at the northwest corner of Third and Whitmore, across Third and across Whitmore from 761 Whitmore—no perimeter fencing. Has sideyard and courtyard fenced along Covington.



View of the same apartment building as above (Derby Gardens, 811 Covington) along Third—no perimeter fencing.





750 Whitmore Road is the brick building with prominent quoins at the northeast corner of Third and Whitmore, It's directly across Whitmore from 761 Whitmore and it lacks fencing around its narrow front and side yards. The same is true for its neighbor further north (17524 Third), with the ribbon windows, visible here.



750 Whitmore Road across Whitmore from 761 Whitmore. No perimeter fencing is present.





730 Whitmore, across the street and slightly east of 761 Whitmore, next to 750 Whitmore—no fencing present. No fencing at its neighbor immediately to the east either, below.



700 Whitmore, apartment building just east of 730 Whitmore, across the street and east of 761 Whitmore—no perimeter fencing.





The next large apartment complex to the east on Whitmore, 660 Whitmore, has almost full perimeter fencing. The fencing is not historic. The white building to the east just visible here is the Unity Temple and that building only has its parking lot fenced in.



653-701 Whitmore, no perimeter fencing.





Apartment complex (725 Whitmore) immediately next to 761 Whitmore to the east. It has a full perimeter fence. Staff believes this fence to be contemporary.



Photo of Whitmore Road looking east from Third—only two buildings you can see in this image have the length of their façade fenced in along the sidewalk.



As mentioned, a survey of part of the larger historic district reveals that most apartment buildings in the district do not have full-perimeter fencing. Staff does not think that many (or perhaps any) of the fences currently in the district are likely from the period of significance.