

STAFF REPORT 02-11-2026 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: G. LANDSBERG

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00706

ADDRESS: 8029 COE, 1500-1532 VAN DYKE

HISTORIC DISTRICT: WEST VILLAGE

APPLICANT: CLIFFORD A. BROWN/COE VAN DYKE 2, LLC

OWNER: COE VAN DYKE 2 LLC, WEST VILLAGE LAND HOLDING LLC

ARCHITECT: MARUSICH ARCHITECTURE

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: 11-17-2025

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: 11-19-2025, 01-30-2026

SCOPE: DEMOLISH TWO HOUSES, ERECT MULTI-FAMILY BUILDING

EXISTING CONDITIONS & PROPERTY HISTORY

The development parcel is composed of six (6) separate parcels currently under ownership/control of the project developer after transfer from the Detroit Land Bank Authority for the purposes of this project. The development is proposed to occupy an area bound by Coe Street to the south, Van Dyke to the west, the southern boundary of 1536 Van Dyke (8020 St. Paul) to the north, and the north-south alley running between Van Dyke and Parker Street to the east. Four of the parcels are vacant; two parcels (1514 and 1532 Van Dyke) are occupied by modest frame dwellings, which are contributing historic resources for the district.



View of existing conditions at the northeast corner of Van Dyke and Coe, view to the northeast from Van Dyke. Visible are the houses at 1514 Van Dyke (light beige, center of image) and 1532 Van Dyke (gray single-story at background left). Staff photo, January 30, 2026.

The 1983 designation report prepared by the Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB) notes that West Village received its name in the mid-20th century because of its location west of Indian Village. The report continues:

West Village not only has different physical characteristics than Indian Village in that it is more densely built-up and the lots are smaller, but unlike its neighbor, it has always sheltered a variety of social classes ranging from factor workers and artisans to millionaires...West Village contains a great variety

of dwelling types representing the full range of housing concepts popular in the period from 1850 to 1930. The neighborhood has always sheltered a mixture of income groups with the result that there are modest frame workers' cottages, two-family houses, commodious middle-class single-family dwellings, spacious upper-class mansions, terrace houses, and various types of apartment buildings.

The subject development parcel happens to be on one of the first three blocks platted in the initial development of the original Van Dyke ribbon farm, and still reflects in physical form this first wave of 19th century development. The existing houses on this parcel are representative of the “modest Victorian cottages” prominently discussed in the district’s designation report.



Parcel view of vicinity, subject parcels outlined in red. Blue arrow shows location of photo from previous page.



View of existing conditions at southeast corner of Van Dyke and Coe, view to the south from Coe Avenue. This is a portion of the Coe I, the first phase of the Coe for which the current development parcel was proposed to be the second phase. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.



3D aerial view of vicinity, dominated by the multi-story Parkstone, at center, and other mid-rise apartment buildings. Red arrow indicates project site. Note especially the typical West Village mix of older, small frame houses and large masonry apartment buildings, reflecting the suspension of neighborhood development during the Depression.

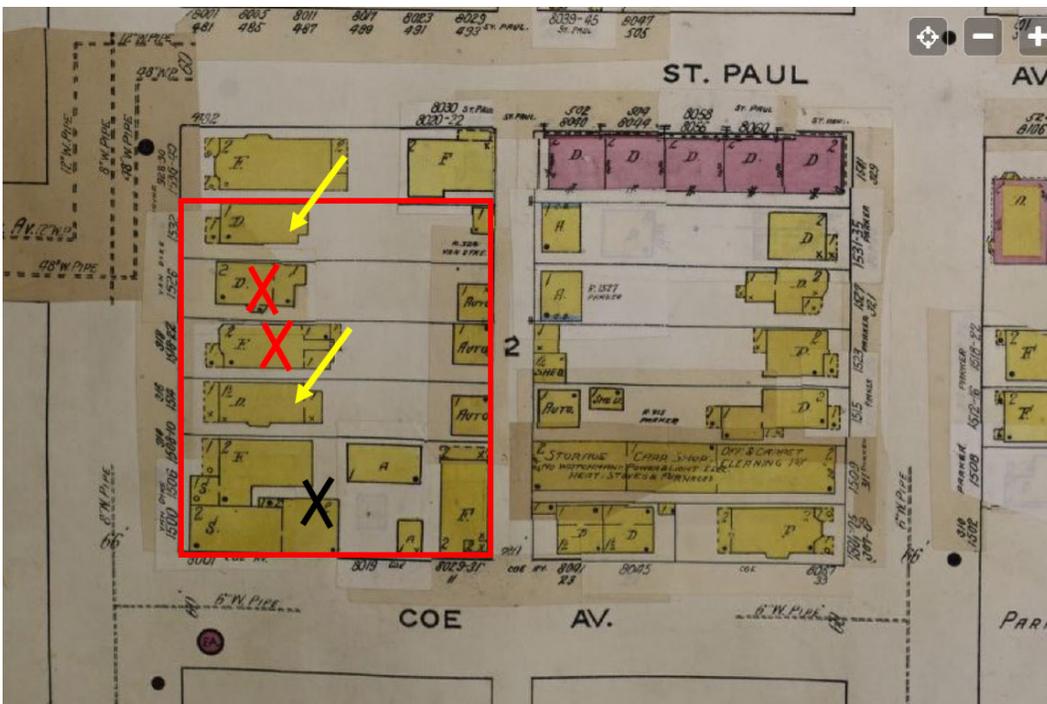
The lot at the corner of Coe and Van Dyke was already vacant at the establishment of the historic district in 1983. However, as recently as 2013, a row of four original nineteenth century houses survived on the remainder of the subject development parcel, terminating with the 20th century duplex at the corner of St. Paul (1536 Van Dyke, not on the project parcel). In November 2013, a major fire at 1526 Van Dyke spread and damaged the adjacent 1518 Van Dyke to the south; both houses were demolished without HDC review in 2015, creating the vacant lot and streetscape gap that exists today.



Sanborn map of vicinity, dated 1897. Project site is shown outlined in red. 1514 Van Dyke (originally 316 Van Dyke) and 1532 Van Dyke (originally 324 Van Dyke) are shown to exist at this time, confirming that they are both nineteenth-century structures.



View of houses (1532 and 1518 Van Dyke, marked by red X's) formerly on the project site, from this November 2013 image. The parcels occupied by these houses now exist as vacant land between the extant 1532 Van Dyke (far left) and 1514 Van Dyke (far right). Staff photo.



Sanborn map view of vicinity, circa 1951. Project site is shown outlined in red. Parcels with an "X" are now vacant lots, though some have trees which contribute to tree canopy. Yellow arrows are the current extant resources (1514 and 1532 Van Dyke, both of which are wood-framed dwellings). Red X's denote the resources lost in 2013, visible in the above image. The demolitions marked by the black X occurred prior to the 1983 designation of the district. Note the retail spaces ("S"= store) at the corner.

1514 Van Dyke

The southernmost of the pair of houses proposed to be demolished, this dwelling appears on the 1897 Sanborn map, and is likely at least a decade older than that. Although it has suffered inappropriate applications of pale yellow aluminum siding, inappropriate replacement of doors, windows, and porch elements, and deferred maintenance, it is still recognizably a nineteenth century house associated with the earliest period of development in this district. It also features a particularly distinctive corner bay projecting from the southwest (front) corner adjacent to the front entrance. It appears to be in fair to poor condition and does not appear to be occupied.



Current front view of 1514 Van Dyke, looking east. Staff photo, January 30, 2026..



Current side view of 1514 Van Dyke, looking north. Staff photo, November 19, 2025.



Current view of 1514 Van Dyke, looking northeast. Note unique three-windowed corner bay window at porch (red arrow), which may be a later (turn of the century) but still historic alteration made to enhance the building's aesthetics in the context of the newly upscale Indian Village development nearby. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.

1532 Van Dyke

The northern of the pair of houses proposed to be demolished, this humble house also appears on the 1897 map. Although vacant, and some of its non-historic gray siding suffered scorching from the adjacent 2013 fire, the building appears to be in a salvageable condition typical of many vacant Detroit houses. The house has some unusual and distinct features, including horizontally divided wooden sash, an interesting early modern detail not found elsewhere in the district; perhaps a creative flourish incorporated by the original builder. This house has no basement. Though it has also suffered loss of some porch elements, it retains window entablatures, evidence of a projecting bargeboard detail hidden behind the gable siding, and apparently salvageable wood clapboard as well; as such, in staff's opinion, this house has a higher historic integrity than 1514, is likelier easier to move, and should be assessed to be in fair to poor condition. Removal of the incompatible gray siding, repainting of the original wood finishes, and installation of a period correct set of porch columns would yield a remarkably attractive nineteenth-century frame cottage, as distinctive as any other house in West Village.



Current front view of 1532 Van Dyke, looking east. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.



Current side view of 1532 Van Dyke, looking north. Slight damage from the 2013 fire that destroyed its neighbors is evident. Staff photo, November 19, 2025.



Current rear view of 1532 Van Dyke, looking west. Staff photo, November 19, 2025.



View from St. Paul and Van Dyke, looking eastward into the development parcel. Note large Parkstone apartment building in distance, corner of Parker and Agnes. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.



View southward along Van Dyke towards intersection with Coe, at subject development parcel. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.



View of development parcel highlighting current vacant character. Looking generally west towards Van Dyke from Coe Street..



Historic nineteenth-century dwelling juxtaposed with apartment/commercial buildings on adjacent Agnes Street, all of which are contributing resources to the West Village Historic District, which consists of a wide range of building types, heights, and masses. View to the southeast from Van Dyke. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.



Additional historic context along Van Dyke showing 4-story apartment buildings. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.



View from southeast corner of subject parcel towards Coe I, with Parkstone and Parkhurst apartment buildings visible in the immediate vicinity. Staff photo, January 30, 2026.

STAFF SUMMARY OF SCOPE OF WORK:

Based on staff review of the submitted documents, the following work is proposed:

- **Demolition of existing buildings on site:**
 - 1514 Van Dyke, c. 1880-1897 1½-story house
 - 1532 Van Dyke, c. 1880-1897 1-story house
- **Erection of multi-family, mixed use building**
 - Four-story building with 47 units designed for mixed-incomes
 - Primary Van Dyke façade of the building is proposed in “Midnight Special” brick with occasional “Mustard Yellow” aluminum window “shrouds”. The building rear, visible from Coe Avenue, is Hardie-siding and features a three-story mural installation
 - 43-space parking lot behind building accessible from alley
 - Retail storefront at corner of Coe/Van Dyke
 - New lighting along Coe Street

The full set of submitted design drawings and supporting documents are available on the website for the Commission’s review and analysis. Certain staff-selected excerpts are featured in the next section.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS – CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS (COA)

- The West Village Historic District was established in 1983. Development along Van Dyke began in 1876.
- This is a new proposal by the developer for this parcel. At the October 2021 meeting, and subsequently confirmed by design conditions presented to the Commission at the March 2022 meeting, this body approved the construction of a different design for the site via issuance of a Notice to Proceed. This previous design, by a different architect, was also for a four-story, multi-family/town-home mixed use building. The current heavily revised application does not remove or override that earlier approval, which remains in effect independent of this evening’s decision.



1 VAN DYKE-PERSPECTIVE



2 CORNER OF VAN DYKE AND COE AVE-PERSPECTIVE



3 COE AVE-PERSPECTIVE



4 ALLEY-PERSPECTIVE

THE COE AT WEST VILLAGE - PHASE II

EXTERIOR STREET LEVEL PERSPECTIVES

Architectural renderings of the March 2022 approved Phase II design for The Coe at West Village. This approval is still in effect.

- That Notice to Proceed (NTP) issued by the Commission in October 2021 was “suspended” and remains in that status today, awaiting administrative (staff) confirmation that it has “obtained all necessary planning and zoning approvals, financing, and environmental clearances.” This protective condition prevents premature demolition at the site before all development hurdles have been cleared and it is certain that the project will proceed exactly as approved and the community benefit will be realized as expected. Per the applicant, the earlier fully approved design has now been set aside due to challenges with financing; as such an alternate design has now been submitted to the Commission, which staff could not approve under our delegated “minor changes” authority due to its considerable design variance from the approved design. Along with changes in exterior expression, massing, and materials, the new design eliminates the townhouses lining Coe as a “mirror” to the existing Coe development.
- As noted above, the new design removes the “mirrored townhouse” segment along Coe Avenue in favor of additional parking, and breaks with the previously existing design vocabulary established by the first architect on the south side of Coe, instead introducing a more watered down and derivative approximation of the original high-quality architectural design. Note especially the flatter, less articulated elevation at Van Dyke and the loss of architectural expression along Coe Avenue. As such, staff questions whether the development still visibly qualifies as “Coe II,” that is, as a second phase of a cohesive neighborhood development project envisioned as part of PDD’s community-oriented vision for

the area and erected south of Coe Avenue in 2018. The current proposal is more likely to be experienced, in staff opinion, as a large and visually separate new building focused on Van Dyke and unrelated to the earlier “Coe I” phase (or Coe Avenue itself).



Applicant rendering from submitted drawings. View at Van Dyke and Coe looking northeast.



Applicant site plan from submitted drawings. The existing “Coe I” is indicated by red arrow added by staff. Note lack of a townhouse portion across Coe, as originally envisioned in the Coe II design approved in March 2022. All additional elevations and plans available in applicant submitted materials and incorporated in this report by reference.

- A district’s Elements of Design should always be reviewed for guidance towards the compatibility of new construction proposed for a historic district. The West Village Elements of Design are codified in [Section 21-2-132 of the City Code](#) and excerpted below by staff to highlight conformance, or lack thereof, in our opinion:

- **(1) Height.** Buildings in West Village range in height from one-story to 11 stories. The majority of the residential buildings are 2½ stories tall, meaning they have two full stories plus an attic or finished third floor within the roof. One and one-half-story residential buildings exist and are primarily concentrated on Van Dyke between East Lafayette Boulevard and Kercheval, the east side of Shepherd, and on St. Paul between Shepherd and Van Dyke. Apartment buildings range from two stories to 11 stories tall although buildings of more than four stories are rare. Commercial buildings range from one to three stories tall; the older commercial buildings are two stories tall.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** As an apartment building with 4 stories, the proposal conforms to this Element.



Proposed elevation at Van Dyke, from applicant's submitted drawings. Most of the material is brick.

- **(2) Proportion of buildings' front façades.** Proportion varies in the district, depending on age, style, use and location in a specific subdivision. On narrow, 30-foot to 35-foot parcels, proportion of front façades is narrow compared to depth, and buildings are taller than wide. Apartment buildings are taller than wide, terraces and attached row houses are wider than tall when taken as a whole.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The building is wider than tall. Additional articulation and massing changes might introduce additional vertical emphasis. An attached row house design running wider than tall, such as the now deleted section along Coe, would come closer to meeting this Element. While the originally approved design had a similar footprint along Van Dyke, the different architectural treatments across the façade introduced interest that reduced the impact of its width. Does not conform.
- **(3) Proportion of openings within the façades.** Areas of voids generally constitute between 15 percent and 30 percent of the front façades, excluding the roofs. Most major openings are taller than wide, although when grouped together some may achieve a horizontal affect. Transoms over windows are usually wider than tall or square. Window openings in residences are always subdivided, the most common window type being double-hung sash, whose area may be further subdivided by muntins. Dormer and gable windows exist in a variety of shapes and sizes. The district contains a great variety of sizes, shapes, and arrangements of openings.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** Generally conforms.
- **(4) Rhythm of solids to voids in front façades.** Voids are usually spaced evenly within the façades, resulting in balanced compositions. Voids in buildings derived from classical precedents are usually arranged in a symmetrical manner. Buildings influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement and the Victorian Era display voids arranged with more freedom.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** For a building of contemporary design, the rhythm appears balanced. Generally conforms.

- **(5) Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets.** Spacing of buildings on streets is generally determined by the setback from the side lot line, which tends to vary according to the width of the lot. The regularity of spacing on narrow lots or parcels (30-foot to 40-foot range) is interrupted by vacant lots resulting from demolition as well as the occasional combination of several lots for larger, newer structures. On Parker from East Jefferson Avenue to Agnes where lots are 40 feet to 50 feet wide, houses are most often centered on the lot or sometimes placed closer to one side lot line to form a small side yard or permit space for a driveway.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** This is a combination of lots for a larger, newer structure. Generally conforms.



Proposed elevation at Coe Street, from applicant's submitted drawings

- **(6) Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.** Most residences have porch projections and/or entrance recessions. Porches and entrances on classically inspired buildings are either centrally placed or, as in the case of some duplexes, placed on both sides of the façade in a symmetrical arrangement. Victorian and Arts-and-Crafts-inspired buildings display more freedom in placement. Side and sun porches are rare in the district due to the lack of side yards; a few exist on larger lots. Rowhouses or terraces generally exhibit freedom in placement of porches and entrances within each complex; centrally located recessed entrances in Shipherd Court create a rhythm amongst themselves. Commercial buildings on Kercheval display a progression of recessed entrances, usually two per building. No rhythm is established along the East Jefferson Avenue frontage.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** There is a recessed main entrance along the Van Dyke façade adjacent to the proposed commercial space, compatible with a contemporary design.
- **(7) Relationship of materials.** The majority of the buildings in West Village have either common or pressed brick or clapboard sheathing as their principal exterior material. Stucco wall surfaces also exist as a principal material; some later replacement siding exists in the district, but much of such siding changes the visual relationship of the siding to the building. Masonry is used on the first story only on some houses, and wood shingles exist on some second stories. Most buildings have wood trim; a few more substantial houses and apartment buildings have stone trim. There are some tile roofs; some slate roofs still exist; asphalt replacement roofs are common. Porches are built of brick or wood.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The proposal features brick as the primary exterior cladding, juxtaposed with aluminum window shrouds. Several of the textural accents present in the previous design have been omitted. Though the brick is compatible, the limited palette does not reflect the rich variety of materials present on historic buildings. Does not conform.

WEST VILLAGE APARTMENTS (COE 2.0)
MATERIAL & COLOR SELECTIONS



Material and color selections, from applicant's submitted drawings.

- **(8) Relationship of textures.** *The most common relationships of textures are the low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted to smooth wood trim and/or wood clapboard contrasted with smoother trim. Random ashlar used at the first-story level is contrasted with a wood-sheathed or shingled upper story in a few houses, as is a brick first story and a stuccoed second story. The smoother surface of glazed brick or painted brick is sometimes contrasted with stone or wood trim. Carved wooden detail and half-timbering provide textural interest. Slate and tile roofs provide textural interest whereas asphalt shingles usually do not.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The brick contributes compatible texture. However, the monolithic nature of the brick, combined with its dark expression (see Element 9, below) fails to achieve visual contrasts to other textures anticipated by this Element. Does not conform.
- **(9) Relationship of colors.** *Orange natural brick, pressed brick, and replacement siding in natural earth colors are plentiful in the district; the paint colors of frame houses often relate to style. The classically inspired buildings generally have woodwork painted in the white and cream range. Doors and shutters feature an array of colors, usually harmonizing with the main body of the house. Colors known to have been in use on buildings of this type in the 18th Century or 19th Century on similar buildings may be considered for suitability. Buildings of Medieval or Arts and Crafts inspiration generally have painted woodwork and window frames of dark brown, cream, or other natural tones. Stucco is either left in its natural state or painted in a shade of cream or yellow. Dark brown half-timbering is common. ...*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The proposed “midnight”-toned brick, combined with dark “espresso” cement boards and black window frames and storefronts are inconsistent with the direction of this Element, which identifies “natural earth colors” as being typical of the district. The “mustard yellow” aluminum, similarly, is likely too jarring for the historic context. Does not conform.
- **(10) Relationship of architectural details.** *Architectural details generally relate to style. Victorian architectural details appear on 1½- and 2½-story Victorian cottages; spindlework, fishscale shingles and patterned shingles are indicative of the Queen Anne style. Areas treated include porches, gables, window and door surrounds, and cornices. The buildings influenced by the Arts and Crafts or Medieval sometimes have details carved in wood on window frames, door*

frames and eaves and sometimes have half-timbering. The four-square buildings, mostly on the northern end of the district, have little architectural embellishments; the detail on the eaves, bays, dormers and porch are architectonic. Neo-Georgian or Colonial buildings have classical details in wood on porches, shutters, window frames and dormers. In general, various styles are rich in architectural detail.

- **HDC Staff Opinion:** Though contemporary style buildings often have less detail, the proposed design is especially devoid of architectural variety and “rich detail.” Does not conform.
- **(11) Relationship of roof shapes.** The district is characterized by a diversity of roof shapes. Hipped or pitched roofs on most residential buildings are punctuated with gables and dormers, with the exception of the Victorian cottages, with their steeply pitched roofs, and apartment buildings, whose roofs are not visible from the street. Roofs of commercial buildings generally appear flat. Porch roofs vary greatly according to style.
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The flat roof proposed is compatible with a contemporary design and with neighborhood precedent for commercial/apartment buildings.



Proposed elevation at rear of building (parking lot), showing 3-story mural location proposed. The mural will be printed on fabric/vinyl and installed on building. Mural content is TBD. Most of the material is Hardie-siding, except for the first floor and the portion towards Coe Street at left. From applicant's submitted drawings.

- **(12) Walls of continuity.** The major wall of continuity is created by the buildings, with their generally uniform setbacks within block faces. New buildings should conform to these setbacks where they exist. Fences along building lines extend the major wall of continuity. Hedges extending along the front lot lines create a minor wall of continuity where they exist, and a major wall of continuity where they exist in sufficient quantities such as on Shepherd between St. Paul and Agnes. Gaslights on Parker between East Lafayette Boulevard and the Parkstone parking lot and on Agnes from Parker to Van Dyke create minor walls of continuity, as do trees on tree lawns. Fences in the district exist along side lot lines as well as front lot lines. On Shipherd, garages on the west side of the street create the major wall of continuity. ...
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The proposed setback is generally consistent with other commercial/apartment buildings in the district, which are either at the lot line or set back only slightly. The zero lot line at the corner is especially reflective of traditional early 20th century urbanism.
- **(13) Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.** Very few straight side drives from the street to the rear are present; alley-facing garages are the norm, although many parking bays are present with alley entrances. ... Street pavements are now asphalt; cut stone curbs exist with frequency although in some areas they have been replaced with concrete curbs. Alleys are concrete except for the alley between Shipherd and Van Dyke and the alley between East Jefferson Avenue and Van Dyke Place, which are brick. Steel lighting poles on Van Dyke are fluted; elsewhere in the district on north-south streets O.P. poles are the predominant type. On east-west streets and Shipherd there are telephone poles with cranes carrying lanterns...

- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The proposed site plan indicates four (4) “streetlights up to city standards” along Coe Street. Additional clarification is needed to ensure compatibility. While parking lots and areas behind buildings are typical, there are some ahistorical examples (e.g., Parkstone lot) of parking lots adjacent to sidewalk in the immediate vicinity, as proposed here along Coe. The previous design, with townhouse massing along Coe obscuring the parking area, was more aligned with the historic character of the neighborhood and early 20th century street design. The “green space” occupying the Van Dyke setback is compatible. An existing large tree adjacent to the existing house, subject of concern in the original application, continues to be protected in this revised design.

- **(14) Relationship of open space to structures.** *In those areas of the district where demolition of houses has occurred, the character of the open space is haphazard as it relates to the buildings. ... The boulevard on the south end of Parker provides a more spacious setting for the houses facing it.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** This Element recognizes the ahistorical and haphazard character of open space created by demolition. During the historic area, the subject parcels were densely built-up. The proposal, by reintroducing buildings and density, conforms to this Element..

- **(15) Scale of façades and façade elements.** *There is a variety in scale from block to block depending on lot width and style. ... Size and complexity of façade elements and details either accentuate or subdue the scale of the façades. Façade elements have been determined by what is appropriate for the style. Window sashes are usually subdivided by muntins, which affects the apparent scale of the windows within the façades.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The scale of façade elements is appropriate for the contemporary style proposed. Most of the windows have only one or two subdivisions, at the lower end of complexity. Generally conforms, but additional window subdivisions may be helpful for better scale with respect to the pedestrian context, and may also help with texture and complexity.

- **(16) Directional expression of front elevations.** *The expression of direction on residential blocks is neutral, although individual houses may emphasize their verticality or horizontality according to style. Rowhouses and terraces are horizontal in directional expression; apartment buildings are vertical. Commercial buildings on Kercheval form a horizontal row..*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** As described in Element 2, above, the strong horizontal expression of the building does not conform. Staff recommends changes to massing, or architectural articulations that introduce some verticality or visual relief, similar to the original design presented.



View along Van Dyke to the southeast, from applicant's submitted drawings

- **(17) Rhythm of building setbacks.** *Setbacks on the north-south streets in the district vary slightly from area to area within the district, although they are generally consistent within each street face and/or subdivision because of the existence of various deed restrictions. Buildings on the main east-west streets, which are East Jefferson Avenue, East Lafayette Boulevard, and Agnes, are less consistent in setback due to more recent development. The varying designs of the buildings, frequently with slight setbacks or projections in their façades, cause the buildings to relate to the front setback line in different ways; this creates a slight variation in the setback line.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** As stated in the last phrase above, the “varying designs” of the mixed typology of historic buildings present in West Village “cause the buildings to relate to the front setback line in different ways.” The proposal’s setback rhythm is consistent with commercial/apartment precedents and conforms to this Element.
- **(18) Relationship of lot coverages.** *Lot coverages range from 15 percent to 80 percent. Apartment buildings and rowhouses generally occupy a percentage at the high end of this range. Most homes are in the 20 percent to 35 percent range of lot coverage. Lot coverage is greater north of East Lafayette Boulevard where lots are narrower in width.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** Because of the lack of building massing along Coe, the overall lot coverage of the proposal is somewhat deficient from the “high end” of the 15 percent to 80 percent range described.



View along Coe Street to the northwest, from applicant’s submitted drawings. Note visibility of parking lot.

- **(19) Degree of complexity within the façade.** *The degree of complexity has been determined by what is typical and appropriate for a given style. The classically inspired buildings usually have simple, rectangular façades with varying amounts of ornamentation. Four square buildings are usually less complex with ornament restricted to the porch and entrance and sometimes eaves. Other more decorative styles frequently have façades complicated by gables, bays, slight setbacks, porches, an occasional turret, window and door hoods, and carved detail. Apartment buildings have historical details derived from the styles in which the buildings are designed.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** As described under some other Elements above, the redesigned building does not exhibit the complexity, variety and detailing of the original design, which was also a contemporary proposal but rendered with more richness evocative of historic precedents.

Additional complexity, detail, and texture is needed, especially at smaller scales. Does not conform.

- **(20) Orientation, vistas, overviews.** *Most of the buildings are oriented toward the street. Garages are usually oriented toward an alley; almost all garages are detached and at the rear of the lot. They are not generally visible from the street. Houses on the east side of Shipherd are oriented toward the street and face the garages of buildings oriented towards Seyburn. All houses in Wesson's Subdivision face the north-south streets, except those on the north side of East Lafayette Boulevard. In other subdivisions, the corner house often faces the east-west streets. Rowhouses and terraces are usually oriented toward the east-west streets. Buildings on East Jefferson Avenue are most often slanted slightly towards the west..*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** While the orientation and vistas along Van Dyke conform to this Element and aid the project's compatibility, the lack of development along Coe, particularly given the presence of the Coe I, is a deficiency.



Orthographic birds-eye view of project and context, from applicant's submission.

- **(21) Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.** *Neo-Colonial or Classically-inspired buildings are usually symmetrical. Other styles are asymmetrical but most often result in balanced compositions.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The proposed building has a balanced composition consistent with its contemporary style.
- **(22) General environmental character.** *The West Village District is characterized by residential and minor commercial development dating from 1880 through 1930. Long, straight streets, a significant array of housing types, and a cohesiveness achieved through uniform setbacks and heights result in an urban, medium density neighborhood. Newer commercial and institutional uses exist primarily on the northern and southern fringes of the district. West Village is of an urban character, rare in the City, because of the diversity of building types in the area.*
- **HDC Staff Opinion:** The proposed building reinforces the “urban, medium density” character and “diversity of building types” reflective of the historic character of the West Village Historic District.

- HDC staff, per the analysis above, assesses that Elements 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18, 19 are not achieved by the proposed redesign.
- The existing homes at 1514 and 1532 Van Dyke, discussed individually below, date to the neighborhood's earliest development period and are clearly the first permanent buildings erected on this land. It is staff's opinion that while their current appearance may be derelict and/or abandoned, each of the buildings do maintain *integrity* under National Park Service definitions applicable to historic districts, and the two buildings are thus *contributing resources* to this district. *Integrity* is defined as "the ability of a property to convey its historical associations or attributes," and is divided into seven aspects. These aspects are location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, all of which are defined by statute, guidelines, and professional practice.
- The developer, in the original development agreement with the Land Bank, agreed to move the historic structures prior to the development of the site. Typically, and under a strict reading of the NPS guidelines, moving of buildings has the potential to destroy *integrity of setting* and thus remove the resource from contributing status or historic eligibility. However, HDC staff was comfortable at that time (early 2019) in giving a conceptual green-light to a potential move, dependent of course on HDC approval, for several reasons:
 - The West Village has a history of moved houses, including at least one (i.e., 7930 Agnes) since it has become a historic district, suggesting that moving these smaller frame houses around in the same historic context may not completely disrupt their integrity of setting, and may indeed strengthen the historic character and viability of the overall district
 - There are many vacant lots in the neighborhood where similar nineteenth century homes once stood and have long since disappeared. Rebuilding the streetscape with historic houses "native" to the neighborhood would be preferable to losing even more houses.
 - It is known to historic staff that dozens, if not hundreds, of smaller houses were moved in Detroit during the freeway construction campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, as their owners sought to preserve them in new settings. Although documentation is still evolving, and no historic context has been prepared around this theme, staff considers it likely that such activity could have historic resonance and thematic importance in and of itself, ultimately extending toward a reasonable interpretation of integrity for historic settings in Detroit, given that many houses may not be in their original locations.
 - HDC staff, who are also of course planning staff, did agree that additional density and housing on Van Dyke is desirable and appropriate for this corridor, and that transforming the current (mostly) vacant condition of this block is a major opportunity that would merit any loss of integrity incurred by moving these contributing buildings. The restoration of commercial space at the corner is an opportunity to recapture street activity and economic impacts once enjoyed by this neighborhood.
- However, although HDC staff was prepared to recommend a COA for the moving of the houses, and has always supported conceptual development of a dense, modern, mixed-use building on the site, the proposal to instead demolish these houses removes that recommendation from the table. The developer has claimed in his application materials that the move alone for both houses would cost approximately \$450,000, not including the costs to perform a full rehabilitation. A "move budget" is included in the applicant's submitted materials.
- Though these are both very modest, humble, unpretentious and minimally adorned structures, historic preservation is not only about preserving "glorious," beautiful, or resplendent places. Historic preservation is about preserving history, (i.e., physical fabric), that is important in telling a significant story about a particular part of our built environment, according to the reasons that the district was deemed significant in the first place. These two structures do exactly that, as the significant history of this district extends from the first small working-class dwellings to the large luxury apartment buildings of the 1920s.
- Demolition of a *contributing resource* in a historic district is plainly contrary to the principles and public purpose of historic preservation, as enshrined in both federal/state law and local ordinance. The buildings proposed for demolition are contributing resources to the West Village 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 these buildings will directly and negatively

impact the historic district. As such, it is staff's recommendation that a proposal requiring the demolition of both houses should be considered inappropriate under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and thus ineligible for an approval via a Certificate of Appropriateness

ISSUES PREVENTING A RECOMMENDATION FOR COA

- The historic houses at 1514 Van Dyke and 1532 Van Dyke are contributing resources that retain their historic integrity and should not be demolished.
- The proposed building is too horizontally oriented, and should be redesigned to incorporate additional vertical emphasis via massing changes or additional architectural articulation.
- The limited material palette does not reflect the rich variety of material present on historic buildings in the district. At least one additional material, preferably natural (wood or stone), should be introduced.
- The monolithic nature of the brick is not relieved by contrasts with other textures.
- The selected color palette is too dark. At a minimum, a lighter brick mix in earth tones should be specified.
- The design lacks architectural variety and rich detailing compatible with its context. Additional details consistent with contemporary architecture should be considered.
- Lot coverage at and along Coe Street is deficient. Consider ways to add massing or bulk to carry a street presence along Coe.
- The degree of complexity, variety, and detailing within the façade, even for a contemporary design, is not sufficient for the context.

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. As stated above, the applicant has specifically requested this consideration.
- 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 as a companion to the staff reports) 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 when it is not in the interest of the majority of the community to retain the resource **and how** that majority interest was determined.*

- The Commission, per the state statute and local ordinance, has the exclusive right to determine for itself what constitutes a “major improvement program” and a “substantial community benefit” as required for inappropriate work by the second “prong” of Section 21-2-75 cited above. In addition to direct input from community members, the Commission has often relied on the input of the Planning and Development Department (PDD) or senior/elected city officials when considering what constitutes community benefit, as these entities are tasked with undertaking community engagement and tracking community needs and concerns. To date, the Planning Department has made no endorsement to the Commission for advancement of a NTP for this revised design; nor has the Commission received communication from any senior/elected city officials on this matter. (As a reminder, and as stated above, the previous October 2021 design still holds its NTP approval independent of the Commission’s action today, subject to the fulfillment of its conditions. However, that previous NTP is not portable to a different design, except as approved by the Commission.)

RECOMMENDATION

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

Recommendation 1 of 1, Denial

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the West Village 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.

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

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

And Elements of Design 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18 and 19.

For the following reasons:

- The houses proposed for demolition are contributing buildings 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 these buildings will directly and negatively impact the historic district.
- The proposed building is too horizontally oriented, and should be redesigned to incorporate additional vertical emphasis via massing changes or additional architectural articulation.
- The limited material palette does not reflect the rich variety of material present on historic buildings in the district. At least one additional accent material, preferably natural (wood or stone), should be introduced across the facades.

- The monolithic nature of the brick is not relieved by contrasts with other textures.
- The selected color palette is too dark. At a minimum, a lighter brick mix in earth tones should be specified.
- The design lacks architectural variety and rich detailing compatible with its context. Additional smaller-scale details consistent with contemporary architecture should be considered.
- Lot coverage at and along Coe Street is deficient. Consider ways to add massing or bulk to carry a street presence along Coe.
- The degree of complexity, variety, and detailing within the façade, even for a contemporary design, is not sufficient for this historic context.