



SR-2 – ADVISORY STAFF REPORT (03-06-2026)

This advisory report, prepared by staff, represents the opinion and advice of professional staff, and does not represent nor direct the separate review and decision of the Historic District Commission. This report serves as an addendum to SR-1, an objective staff summary of the proposal and property.

ADDRESS: 1528 WOODWARD

HISTORIC DISTRICT: LOWER WOODWARD AVENUE

MEETING DATE: 03-06-2026

APPLICATION NUMBER: HDC2025-00747

SCOPE: INSTALL SIGN

ADVISORY STAFF REPORT PREPARED BY: J. ROSS

STAFF OBJECTIONS TO APPROVAL:

This first section describes itemized conclusions/concerns, which, in staff's professional opinion, would prevent the issue of an unconditional Certificate of Appropriateness (COA). "None" means staff has no objections and believes a COA is warranted, with no conditions. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

1. The building contributes to the district, with its historic, character-defining front façade, installed in 1960, remaining as a tangible link to the city's downtown's boom times in the early post-World War II period. The sign is proposed to be installed in a location which will obscure distinctive historic, character-defining architectural elements.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

This second section expands on the reasoning and analysis leading to staff's conclusions given in the first section above. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

- The Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District was designated in 2001. The designation report for the district notes that HDAB depended heavily on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) nomination for the Grand Circus Park Historic District, completed in 1983, for their completion of the local district designation. Specifically, please note that the 1983 NRHP nomination referred to 1528 Woodward as a "recently completed office building" and therefore deemed it noncontributing to the district. The HDAB designation report for the Lower Woodward Avenue HD therefore states that that nine of the buildings in the district "...have been identified as non-contributing, coinciding with the national register listing...", to include 1528 Woodward. However, staff does note that the 2001 HDAB designation report states that the building remained as a "...fine example of curtain wall construction" despite its stated noncontributing status. See the below 1960 article the Detroit Free Press article re: the new façade which states that "...bad masonry was replaced with a facade of stainless-steel ribs,

rigidized porcelain enamel panels and bright blue tile – an eye catcher on Woodward”



EXECUTIVE OFFICE has Torch Drive mementoes on natural linen wall, burnt avocado seating pieces in conference area, orange accents.



Free Press photos by Ned Johnson

Face-Lift For an Old Downtowner

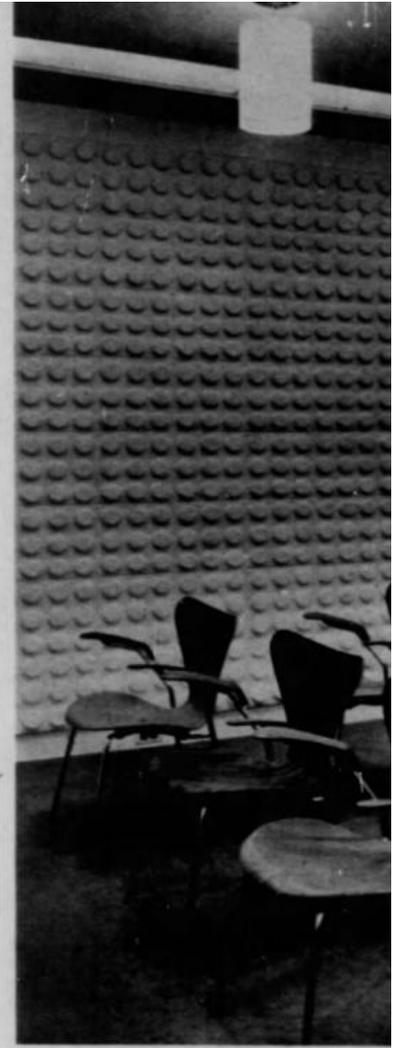
When the six-story building at 1528 Woodward was donated to the United Foundation to help cut the cost of fund-raising, it was structurally sound but in need of drastic renovation. Fortunately the gift from Kresge Foundation included \$455,000 for improvements.

It was the architects' job, then, to re-design exterior and interior, employing economical and durable materials, making maximum use of space, and eliminating maintenance problems. With color and a dash of imagination, the architects worked a miracle that could be an inspiration to many a downtown building in need of face-lifting.

Bad masonry was replaced with a facade of stainless steel ribs, rigidized porcelain enamel panels and bright blue tile — an eye-catcher on Woodward.

Indoors, clever ideas substituted for costly materials. Good acoustical effects were obtained in eye-pleasing ways. Offices were given individuality with color.

Architects: Diehl & Diehl,



Detroit Free Press, 1961

- Per the above article, the Diehl and Diehl Inc., a prominent local firm best known for the many churches they designed for the Archdiocese of Detroit, provided the design for 1528 Woodward's 1960 facade
- Staff notes that the Grand Circus Park Historic District NRHP nomination was updated in 2012 to acknowledge the significance of the many post-World War II architectural elements which exist within the district's boundaries. Specifically, the National Park Service/2012 NRHP nomination update to the Grand Circus Park Historic District determined that 1528 Woodward was *contributing* to the district as its 1960 front façade remained as a tangible link to the "...downtown's boom times in the early post-World War II period." Furthermore, that same year, the National Park Service awarded tax credits to the building owner to support the rehabilitation of the building, including the 1960 façade/curtainwall. It is therefore HDC staff's opinion that the building at 1528 Woodward, to include the current 1960 façade, *contributes* to the Lower Woodward Historic District
- See the below photos, which outline the evolution of the building's façade from the early 1900s to the current time:



1528 Woodward, prior to the 1960 installation of the current facade. Source: Wayne State Virtual Motor City

Archive



THE HARLAN ELECTRIC COMPANY
IS PROUD TO BE ASSOCIATED
WITH THE UNITED FOUNDATION
SINCE ITS CREATION

ARCHITECTS: DIEHL & DIEHL, INC.
ENGINEERS: HYDE & BOBBIO, INC.
GEN. CONTRS.: DARIN & ARMSTRONG, INC.

Michigan Society of Architects Monthly Bulletin, 1960. Note the location and design of the United Foundation sign (yellow arrow)



Appearance in 2012, National Register of Historic Places nomination



Appearance in 2013, following National Park Service and HDC approved rehabilitation. Note location of new storefront entrances (yellow arrows).



Current appearance of first story storefront, facing northeast. Photo by applicant

- Staff supports the proposed location of a vent on the rear wall as the façade/curtainwall remains as the most significant architectural element of the building.
- As previously noted, the building was rehabilitated in 2012 by the current owner. HDC staff issued a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for the work as proposed. Specific items related to the façade included:
 - Repair or replace damaged mosaic tile at front façade to match existing
 - Clean front façade spandrels using a method that does not damage the material
 - Repair glazed brick piers at front façade and repoint mortar to match existing
 - Add new aluminum storefront entry at front façade to match existing in material and finish

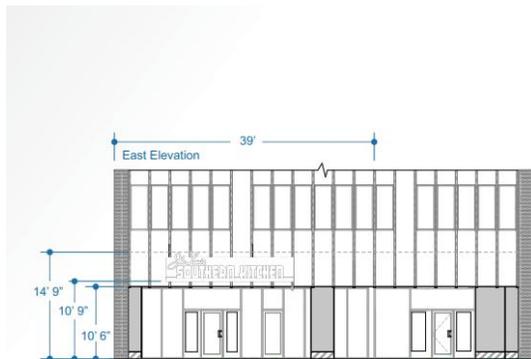
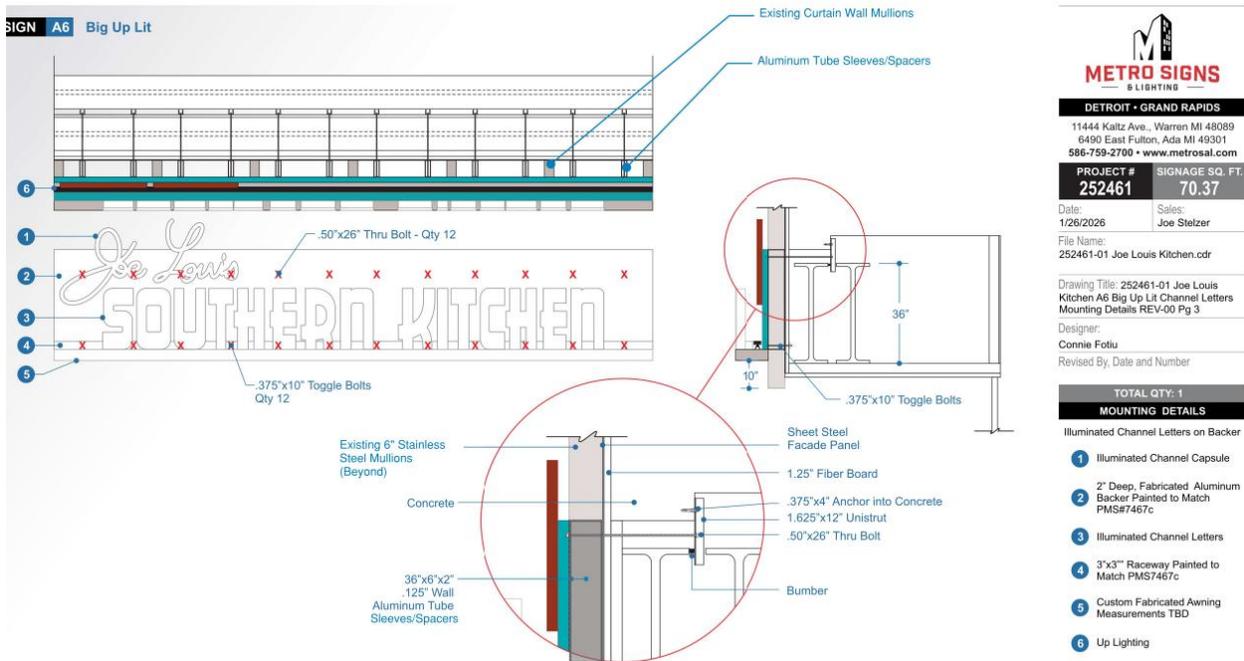
The National Park Service and Michigan State Historic Preservation Office approved the building rehabilitation scope with the award of historic preservation tax credits to support the project.

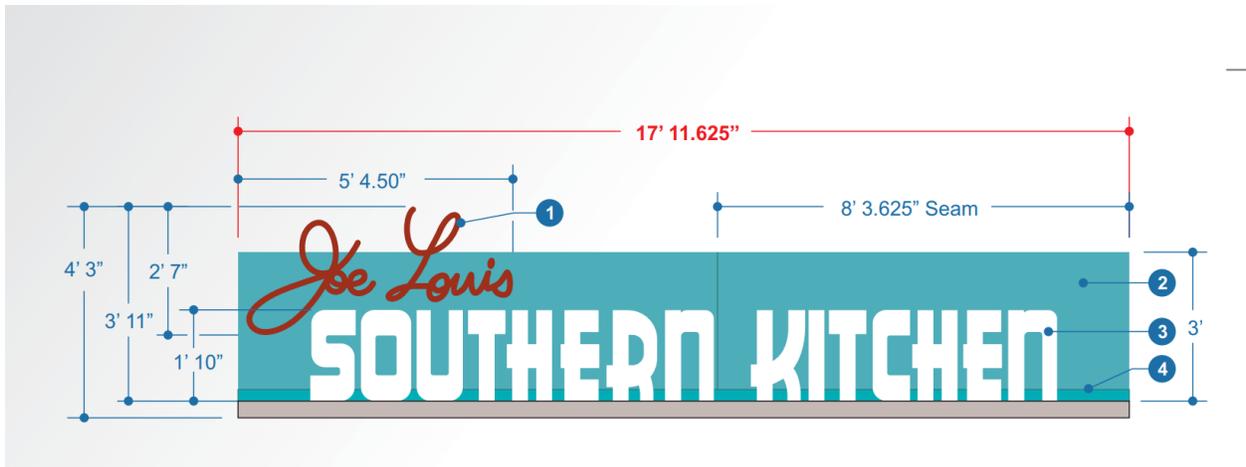
- With respect to the proposed new service door at the building’s storefront, staff notes that the application does seek to retain the existing mullions/vertical framing in the bay where the new door will be located. The new door will match the NPS approved doors which were installed in 2012 and will merely result in the removal of the existing glass within the bay. The work is reversible/will not result in the permanent removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces and spatial relationships that characterize the building. It is therefore staff’s opinion that the work is compatible with the building’s historic appearance.
- See the below images from the application to note that the new sign will measure 4’-3” in height and 17’-11” in length. It will include an aluminum backer panel to which aluminum channel letters with acrylic faces shall be mounted. Each letter will be internally lit. A 10” deep aluminum “awning” with up lights will be line the bottom of the sign. The sign will be affixed to the building via twenty four (24) bolts which will be driven into the façade’s porcelain spandrel panels, according to the applicant. Note that he states that no bolts will be driven into

the building's stainless steel mullions/ribs. Also, note that Element of Design # 15 states that signage is typically located...in a panel designed for such purpose..." Staff notes the following issues with the sign:

- The panel will cover a 4'-5" x 17'-11" portion of the façade, obscuring the distinctive historic character-defining architectural elements behind it. The total panel size is nearly 81 square feet in area.
- As the façade lacks a natural/traditional "sign band" area, it is staff's opinion that the sign will sit awkwardly on the façade in a manner which is not compatible with the building's historic appearance

Staff therefore recommends that the Commission deny this scope item.





Elevation, sections, plan, and renderings. Provided by applicant

- A compatible redesign of the signage might be letter or symbols *without* a backer panel, allowing the distinctive architectural elements of the façade to be readable behind the sign. This approach is observed in the United Foundation (“UF”) sign visible in the 1960 architect’s rendering by Diehl and Diehl, visible on page 4 of this report.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

This third and final section takes staff’s itemized “objections” identified in the first section, and presents them in the form of “conditions” in support of a proposed approval recommendation or “reasons” in support of a proposed denial recommendation, in the form required by Section 21-2-78 of the City Code. The Historic District Commission is not required to accept staff opinions or recommendations.

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

Recommendation 1 of 2, Denial – Install a sign

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be inappropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District’s Elements of Design, specifically:

- 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.*
- Element of Design # 15

For the following reasons;

1. The proposed sign will cover a 4”-5” x 17’-11”/ nearly 81 square foot portion of the façade,

obscuring the distinctive, historic character-defining architectural elements behind it. The district's Element of Design #15 states that signage is typically located...in a panel designed for such purpose..." The application does not conform to that element as the façade lacks a natural/traditional signage "panel"/signband area. The proposed location will therefore result in an awkward installation in which the sign panel will obscure and conceal important architectural features at the façade in a manner which is not compatible with the building's historic appearance

Recommendation 2 of 2, Certificate of Appropriateness: Remaining items

Staff recommends that the proposed work will be appropriate according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Lower Woodward Avenue Historic District's Elements of Design.