

April 06, 2026

From: Jessica Quijano, AIA, HopkinsBurns Design Studio (HBDS)

To: Ellen Thackery, Planner III, Historic Preservation, Planning & Development, City of Detroit, and the Detroit Historic District Commission

RE: Ste. Anne de Detroit: Exterior Restoration and Site Improvements
1000 St Anne St
Detroit, MI 48216
Local Historic District: Ste. Anne's Parish Complex

Subject: Applicant's response to HDC Staff's statement on the contributing status of the existing garage

Starting in June 2025, HopkinsBurns Design Studio (HBDS) has had multiple discussions with HDC staff regarding this historic property and the proposed scope of work for its comprehensive restoration and rehabilitation. Also, HBDS conducted a site visit in November 2025 with both HDC and HDAB staff to review project conditions in person. Communication continued with staff through March 16, 2026, as the project team submitted our HDC application for exterior restoration and site improvements (HDC2026-00107). During this period, it was understood by all parties that short of a significant finding the existing garage (located on the west side of the historic district between the historic chapel and rectory buildings along St Anne Street) would likely not be determined by staff to be contributing to the historic district.

It was brought to our attention on March 25, 2026 that Detroit HDC Staff had changed their position on the contributing status of the existing garage. The staff report for our application states that the existing garage is historic and contributes to the parish complex/historic district. HBDS does not agree with this recent finding and provides the following rationale for your thoughtful consideration.

1. Basis for HDC Staff's decision.

As the basis for their position on the contributing status of the existing garage, staff identified one part of a sentence (highlighted below) from the second paragraph of the Historic Designation Advisory Board (HDAB) Final Report for the Ste. Anne Parish Complex Historic District which states,

The proposed Ste. Anne's Parish Complex Historic District consists of the western two-thirds of a block lying just east of the Ambassador Bridge approaches and I-75, and southeast of the intersection of I-75 and I-96. The proposed district contains five major buildings; the church, rectory, school, convent, and hall; all structures within the boundaries contribute to the historical and/or architectural character of the district. The east one-third of the block is mostly vacant, but does contain a distinguished nineteenth-century firehouse by the architect George D. Mason. The proposed district is located within the Hubbard-Richard Citizens District Council area, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The highlighted text is not very clear and is misleading. HBDS understands the clause that begins with "all structures..." as referring to the "five major buildings" that are specifically identified/listed in the earlier clause. If HDAB believed that the garage was also major/significant, then why was it not explicitly listed along with the other "five major buildings"?

Neither the National Register nomination (c. 1976) nor the HDAB report (c. 1995) describe in detail what the garage looked/looks like, any significant character-defining features of the garage, or how it adds to the historic association and/or architectural importance for which the district is significant. During two major efforts, nearly 20 years apart, to document the architectural and historic significance of this parish complex, it was determined both times by the parties involved to not unmistakably identify the garage as contributing.

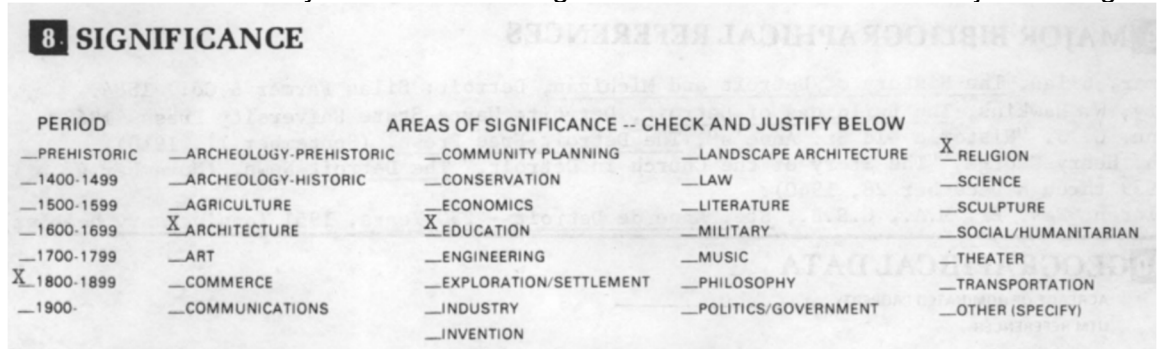
2. The physical characteristics and historic significance of a district provides the basis for evaluating component resources.

As explained in *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Prepare National Register Registration Forms*, the physical characteristics and historic significance of a district provide the basis for evaluating component resources. A contributing building, site, structure, or object adds to the historic associations, historic architectural qualities, or archeological values for which a property is significant because:

- ***it was present during the period of significance,***

Response to bullet item above

- No.
- The HDAB report does not explicitly identify a Period of Significance.
- The National Register nomination simply indicates a check mark in the standard form (copied below) for the period of "1800-1899." No detailed justification is provided, but it is understood to refer only to the dates of original construction for the five major buildings:



- - Basilica & Chapel: c. 1886
 - Rectory: c. 1886 (c. 1918 for 2-story east addn. and 1-story east addn.; c. 1921 for wraparound Porch)
 - School: c. 1887 (*NOT IN PROJECT SCOPE*)
 - Convent (present day Wellness Center): c. 1889 (3rd-story rear addn. btwn 1961-1977)
 - Parish Hall: c. 1898

- The specific date of original construction of the existing garage is unknown. We understand that the City of Detroit has record of a permit being pulled for construction of a "solid brick garage" in 1923; however, it has not been confirmed with other evidence that construction was executed immediately. Also, it is unknown if any subsequent permits were pulled for this garage and/or location on the site, if the garage was ever modified (modern metal overhead door exists today), or if the existing configuration matches the c.1923 configuration. Through our research of Sanborn Maps, a large gap exists between 1921 and 1950. The garage does not appear on the 1921 map. The garage first appears on the 1950 map.

- ***it relates to the documented significance of the property, and***

Response to bullet item above

- No.

- The documented areas of significance include architecture, education, and religion. This existing garage does not relate to any of these three areas.
- Architectural styles of the five major buildings include:
 - Late Gothic Revival with elements of Romanesque Revival, Neo-Classical Revival, 2nd Empire and 2nd Renaissance Revival.
 - The existing garage does not exhibit characteristics of the above styles. The garage does not contribute to the significance of architecture for the historic parish complex.
- Character-defining primary exterior material shared by the five major buildings (original construction)
 - Detroit common brick was used as the primary exterior building material for all five of the major buildings. This brick presents a generally smooth face/surface with a color range of red, red-orange, and orange.
 - Typical of 19th/early 20th century construction in Detroit.
 - Unlike the five major buildings, the primary (west) elevation of the existing garage was constructed with "tapestry brick." This brick presents a textured, rough face/surface with a single color of dark/deep red.
 - Popular in early 20th century, frequently featured in Arts & Crafts style architecture.
 - The garage does not contribute to the significance of architecture for the historic parish complex.
- Education and Religion
 - The garage was constructed as an ancillary building. It was constructed for the simple purpose of providing covered parking for resident priest(s). It does not contribute to the significance of education and religion for the historic parish complex.
- **it possesses historic integrity or is capable of yielding important information about the period; or**
Response to bullet item above
 - No.
 - See evaluation of integrity for the existing garage below (Item #3).
- **it independently meets the National Register criteria.**
Response to bullet item above
 - No.
 - The existing garage as a stand-alone building/structure does not meet any of the four National Register criteria for evaluation (listed below for reference).
 - A) Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
 - B) Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
 - C) Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
 - D) Property has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

3. Evaluation of the seven aspects of integrity for the existing garage.

National Register Bulletin 15, page 50 states that "Integrity is the ability of a property to convey its significance. [...] Within the concept of integrity, the National Register criteria recognizes seven aspects

or qualities that, in various combinations, define integrity. To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects.”

The evaluation of the aspects of integrity for the existing garage, and its impact on the adjacent major buildings (specifically, the historic chapel and rectory), is described below, along with the following color code system (**green**: does retain aspect of integrity; **red**: does not retain aspect of integrity; and **yellow**: aspect of integrity is compromised).

- **Location**

- The present-day location of the garage appears to align with the location shown in the 1950 Sanborn Map. The location of the historic open space, framed by the historic chapel and rectory has remained the same since the original late 19th century parish complex design and construction. The evaluation of the portion of construction within this open space, however, is layered. Although they are separate aspects of integrity, location and setting are related; they complement each other, especially when considering the context of a historic district. The garage located between the historic chapel and rectory diminishes the setting of the adjacent buildings and the surrounding complex and streetscape (see evaluation of Setting below for additional information); therefore, the location of the adjacent buildings and the surrounding context is weakened, too. The existing garage location compromises the spatial relationship between the historic chapel and rectory by blocking and disrupting the courtyard space that provides for the visual separation of the buildings, allowing them to be identified as separate buildings each with their own unique qualities and features.

- **Design**

- As the HDAB report states, “The parish complex built there, still intact, is a superb example of a late nineteenth century Catholic parish, complete with church, chapel, rectory, convent, school, and parish hall.” The integrity of this original late 19th century/Victorian-era parish complex design is retained; however, the design of the existing garage compromises the overall design integrity of the original conception and planning of the property. The design of the circa 1920s garage is incompatible with and detracts from the design of the site and five major buildings. The organization of space (insensitive infill construction), proportion, scale, construction methods and techniques, style and ornamentation, and materials exhibited by the garage do not add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which the late 19th century/Victorian-era parish complex property is significant.

The garage insensitively presents itself along the historic streetscape on St Anne Street. While the garage is smaller in proportion, scale, and size compared to the five major buildings, this ancillary service building is not set back from the primary wall plane established by the original significant buildings along the St Anne streetscape. The construction and placement/location of the garage misrepresent what the public sees as one of the oldest and intact 19th century/Victorian-era complexes in the City of Detroit. The non-original garage is not a result of a composed design decision for the property as a whole; rather, it is a subsequent insertion that compromises the integrity, quality, and historic character of the original parish complex and streetscape design.

- **Setting**

- The placement/position of the existing garage in its environment/surroundings – located within the intimately scaled open space between the historic chapel and rectory buildings – destroys historic spatial relationships and qualities that characterize the property. The open space between these two major buildings was an intentional element of the original parish complex design. The garage occupies this character-defining open space in a

manner that is disrespectful and visually incompatible. The garage also detracts from and disrespects character-defining features of the adjacent historic and contributing buildings. The garage conceals from public view the historic stained-glass windows and masonry features of the south elevation of the chapel; a significant portion of the north elevation of the original rectory building; and a significant portion of the west elevation of the building that connects the chapel and rectory. In addition to the character-defining features of contributing exterior elevations and open space, this area of the site is a physical representation of a significant function of the historic parish – it is the connection between the sacred spaces (church and chapel) and the resident priests (rectory). The existing garage disrespects and diminishes this significant and essential relationship and function.

- **Materials**

- While each of the five major buildings exhibits its own distinct design, the use of a common materials palette including matching brick masonry (Detroit common); limestone; copper and metal details at and along roofs; and metal and wood cornice details creates a sense of design harmony across the parish complex/district. The materials used for the construction of the garage are inconsistent with the materials used for the five major historic buildings in the district. The primary brick masonry of the garage is of a different color, texture and joint profiles than that which is used on primary elevations of the five major buildings. Also, the garage is the only building on the site that uses clay coping tiles as part of its roof edge (parapet cap) construction; metal or stone are used for coping/caps at the five major buildings.

Even as a stand-alone building/structure, the integrity of materials of the existing garage is compromised. The historic garage doors, which would be a key exterior material for this building type, no longer exist (previously removed, unknown date). Where one would expect to find carriage house style wood garage doors (possible two pairs since this was a two-car garage), a single wide modern metal overhead rolling door exists.

- **Workmanship**

- The physical evidence of the existing garage does not exhibit construction methods, craftsmanship, or innovative building techniques that add to the historic associations or historic architectural qualities for which the historic parish complex property is significant. The HDAB report states, "The parish complex built there, still intact, is a superb example of a late nineteenth century Catholic parish, complete with church, chapel, rectory, convent, school, and parish hall." The report goes on to describe the character-defining features of each of the five major buildings, including the following comments on the masonry workmanship:
 - Church building: "The body of the church is an excellent example of Victorian brickwork, including attached buttresses, window hoodmoulds, and blind arcading corbeled out at the eave."
 - Convent building: "This building of great simplicity once again demonstrates the effective use of brickwork."
 - No such comments are provided for the existing garage.

While each of the five major buildings exhibits unique masonry details that are characteristic of their respective late 19th century/Victorian-era architectural styles, the common brick masonry pattern used at each of the five major buildings is a running bond pattern. The brick masonry pattern used at the front/primary elevation of the existing garage is a "tapestry brick" pattern, which is characteristic of Arts & Crafts style architecture. The rough-textured brick is laid in a stacked bond pattern with integrated brick "panels/frames." The existing garage exhibits aesthetic principles and construction

practices from a different period of time, approximately 40 years later. Its primary brickwork is incongruous with the workmanship of the contributing late 19th century/Victorian-era Catholic parish buildings.

- **Feeling**
 - The physical features of the site and five major buildings of the historic parish complex are an expression of late 19th century/Victorian-era architecture and religious life in this part of the City of Detroit. When viewed/experienced together, the site and five major buildings convey the property's historic character. The physical features of the existing garage are incongruous within the historic complex. The garage contrasts with its physical surroundings – it is of a different design/style, material (color, texture and joint profiles of masonry on primary elevation), scale, proportion, and massing. This dissonance diminishes the cohesive character and feeling of the historic district, especially the historic streetscape along St Anne Street.
- **Association**
 - There is no direct link between an important historic event or person and the existing garage.

The physical characteristics and historic significance of a district provide the basis for evaluating component resources. A contributing building or structure adds to the historic associations, historic architectural qualities, or archeological values for which a property is significant because it possesses historic integrity. "To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects [of integrity]" (Bulletin 15, p. 44). The above-described evaluation of integrity proves that the existing garage construction located between the historic chapel and rectory buildings does not retain significant aspects of integrity and it compromises certain aspects of integrity for the original late 19th century/Victorian-era site and five major buildings; thus, the existing garage is not a contributing building or structure.

4. Site improvements and restoration of historic relationships

The construction and placement/location of the garage misrepresent what the public sees as one of the oldest and intact 19th century/Victorian-era complexes in the City of Detroit. Removal of the garage restores the historic integrity, essential form, and character-defining features of the original historic site and major buildings along St Anne Street. The following features would again be visible to the public: the historic stained-glass windows and masonry features of the south elevation of the chapel; the north elevation of the original rectory building; and the west elevation of the building that connects the chapel and rectory. Furthermore, the historic and functional relationship expressed by the architecture between the sacred spaces (church and chapel) and the priests (rectory) will be restored and celebrated.

As part of the proposed comprehensive restoration and rehabilitation project, the historic integrity and relationships of the setting will be restored by removal of the garage. Secondly, the quality and value of the courtyard space will be significantly improved. A modestly sized courtyard/terrace is planned for this space, to provide an outdoor "room" where the parish community and staff can experience a serene outdoor space defined by the original historic parish site and buildings. A space where people may gather, rest, reflect, and enjoy the beauty of the historic chapel and rectory. Lastly, a third significant benefit of the garage's removal is the ability to provide barrier-free building access into the rectory at the west side of the district. (This will ultimately connect with the proposed future addition at the north side of the Parish Hall, which will provide barrier-free building access to that building from within the parish complex.) By removing the non-contributing garage, space will be gained in an already-limited area, to accommodate a sensitively designed system of sloped walks and landing levels. The design of this new feature will be as unobtrusive as possible, retain the historic relationships between the historic buildings and site, and will be compatible with the historic character of the district setting.

Ste. Anne de Detroit

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In summary,

The National Register nomination and HDAB report are both vague and lack specificity when identifying and addressing the existing garage. We do not believe that the one part of a sentence from the second paragraph of the HDAB report is a "significant finding." Based on our evaluation detailed above, we believe that the existing garage is non-contributing to the historic district / Ste. Anne's Parish Complex. Therefore, we believe that demolition of the existing garage meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

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