

## MEMORANDUM

To: Historic District Commission

From: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

Date: January 9, 2014

Re: Revised Application for 318 West Liberty Street

Revisions have been received for the postponed application at 318 West Liberty Street. At the December 12, 2013 Historic District Commission meeting, various concerns were expressed by commissioners and staff about the building's size, placement, materials, and other elements of the project.

Revisions promised at the meeting have been made. The east elevation and the garage-level are now clad in brick, and square windows on the third floor near the front have been replaced with more proportionate ones. The color palate for the boxed-out windows and the third floor cladding has been reduced from three colors to two.

The building has been shifted 4 ½' closer to the rear property line, and shortened another 4 ½', setting the building 9' farther from West Liberty than the previous application and providing some lawn next to the sidewalk. This is a good start, but is still considerably short of the setback and alignment pattern seen on neighboring historic properties. In order to maintain the existing spacing of front yard setbacks along the block as seen from the street and avoid destroying historic relationships, the front of the building should be pulled back at least another 10' to 37'. This is not as far back as the Brehme house next door (43'), but is consistent with the next two houses to the west (37' and 38', measured to the house not the porch). As further evidence of the need to follow the historic setback pattern, the addition to the church on the corner (420 West Liberty) has a 25' front setback, and the result is too much mass set in front of the Queen Anne house at 408 West Liberty, despite the addition being only a single story.

Three light posts have been added along the West Liberty sidewalk. These lights are not in keeping with the residential character of the block, and should not be approved.

As a more general comment, staff has some reservations about the organic waterfall design of the front yard landscaping. A simple walkway with a lawn might better respect the neighborhood character, or possibly a more symmetrical retaining wall or walls parallel to the West Liberty sidewalk.

The original staff report is attached, and the standards and guidelines still apply. Staff's opinion is that the revised project does not meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines* and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines* for the reasons described above.

## ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

### Staff Report

**ADDRESS:** 318 West Liberty Street, Application Number HDC13-213

**DISTRICT:** Old West Side Historic District

**REPORT DATE:** December 12, 2013

**REPORT PREPARED BY:** Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

**REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE:** Monday, December 9, 2013

<b>OWNER</b>	<b>APPLICANT</b>
<b>Name:</b> Liberty Car Wash LLC	Alex De Parry
<b>Address:</b> 1335 Kelley Green Ann Arbor, MI 48108	Fifth Avenue Limited Partnership 202 East Madison Ann Arbor, MI 48103
<b>Phone:</b> (734) 476-7501	(734) 761-8990

**BACKGROUND:** The Liberty Car Wash was constructed in 1966 and replaced a 1 ½ story wood framed house that occupied the site until at least 1960 (per 1925 and 1971 Sanborn Maps and the 1960 Polk Directory).

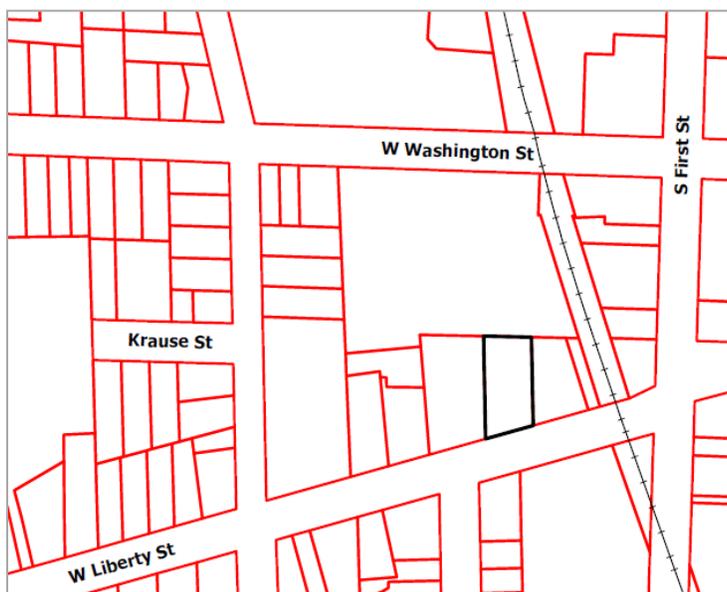
**LOCATION:** The building is located on the north side of West Liberty Street, between South First Street and Second Street.

**APPLICATION:** The applicant seeks HDC approval to demolish a non-contributing car wash and construct a four story, eight unit condominium building with parking underneath.

#### APPLICABLE REGULATIONS:

##### From the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:

- (1) A property will be used as it was historically or be given a new use that requires minimal change to its distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships.
- (2) The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The removal of distinctive materials or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.



- (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.
- (10) New additions and adjacent or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

**From the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings (other SOI Guidelines may also apply):**

**District/Neighborhood**

*Not Recommended:* Introducing new construction into historic districts that is visually incompatible or that destroys historic relationships within the district or neighborhood.

**From the Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines (other Guidelines may apply):**

**All New Construction**

*Appropriate:* Retaining the historic relationship between buildings, landscape features and open space.

Designing new features so they are compatible with the historic character of the site, district, and neighborhood.

Basing the site location of new buildings on existing district setbacks, orientation, spacing and distance between adjacent buildings.

Designing new sidewalks, entrances, steps, porches and canopies to be consistent with the historic rhythm established in the district.

Designing new buildings to be compatible with, but discernible from, surrounding buildings that contribute to the overall character of the historic district in terms of height, form, size, scale, massing, proportions, and roof shape.

*Not Appropriate:* Introducing new construction onto a site or in a district, which is visually incompatible in terms of size, scale, design, materials, and texture or which destroys relationships on the site or the district

**New Construction in Historic Residential Settings**

*Appropriate:* Maintaining the existing spacing of front and side yard setbacks along a block as seen from the street.

Orienting the front of a house towards the street and clearly identifying the front door.

Designing a new front façade that is similar in scale and proportion to surrounding buildings that contribute to the overall character of the historic district.

Designing the spacing, placement, scale, orientation, proportion, pattern and size of window and door openings in new buildings to be compatible with surrounding historic buildings.

Selecting materials and finishes that are compatible with historic materials and finishes found in surrounding buildings that contribute to their historic character.

*Not Appropriate:* Paving a high percentage of a front yard area or otherwise disrupting the landscape pattern within front yard setbacks

Placing a structure outside of the existing pattern of front yard setbacks along a historic residential block

### **New Construction in Historic Commercial Settings**

New construction should be compatible with the context of its surrounding historic district.

Maintaining the setback and alignment pattern seen on surrounding historic properties should take precedence over the setback and alignment pattern of any surrounding properties that are not historic.

Alternative building orientations should generally not be considered for new construction in historic districts.

Building massing should fit with existing historic patterns.

Buildings should not be immense in scale or greatly contrast with the existing scale on the block or in the surrounding historic district.

### **STAFF FINDINGS:**

1. This site has high visibility, is located on a block of very significant historic residential structures constructed between 1860 and 1891, and serves as a gateway to the Old West Side Historic District and neighborhood.
2. The south (front), north, and west elevations are primarily clad in brick on the first and second floors, with popped-out vertical window panels clad in smooth cementitious panel board (like Hardi-panel). The east elevation, over the parking garages, is clad all in panel board, as are all of the third and fourth floors. The use of brick is appropriate in this location near Liberty Lofts and historic brick structures along the railroad corridor. The east elevation should also be clad in brick since it is entirely visible from the street and from the West Liberty approach from downtown. Using brick or a darker stone veneer on the foundation may minimize the floating appearance caused by using lighter stone veneer on the garage face.
3. General staff comments about the design: the combination of horizontal and vertical bands of different colors and materials is visually confusing. If the building is indeed trying

to pay homage to industrial buildings along the railroad corridor, staff's opinion is that it should be clad entirely in brick, or at least on the front and sides. The small square windows on the third floor's southwest corner are out of character with the fenestration pattern of the building and add to the visual jumble.

4. The height and width of the building are appropriate for the site and neighborhood. Pushing back the fourth floor sunrooms from the front and rear elevations helps minimize the height of the building. The third floor roof height is comparable to that of the Brehm House at 326 West Liberty (the Moveable Feast building) next door. Infilling the west edge of the property to match the grade next door and placing the garages on the taller east side is appropriate given the historic residential character of properties to the west and the industrial nature of properties to the east.
5. Staff's biggest concern is about the historic relationships of buildings on this block. The existing carwash (and the house that preceded it) has a front yard setback similar to the three historic homes to the west. The proposed design pushes the front of the condo about 30' in front of this historically established setback line, which is measured perpendicular to Liberty Street. The illustrations on the next page show the established front setback on a 2010 aerial photo, an aerial showing the building superimposed, and a site drawing of the proposed building footprint. The latter two are from the application attachments.

Both the *Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines* and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines* directly address historic relationships between buildings, and established setbacks and alignment patterns. The front of the building needs to be moved back significantly to follow the existing pattern of front yard setbacks.

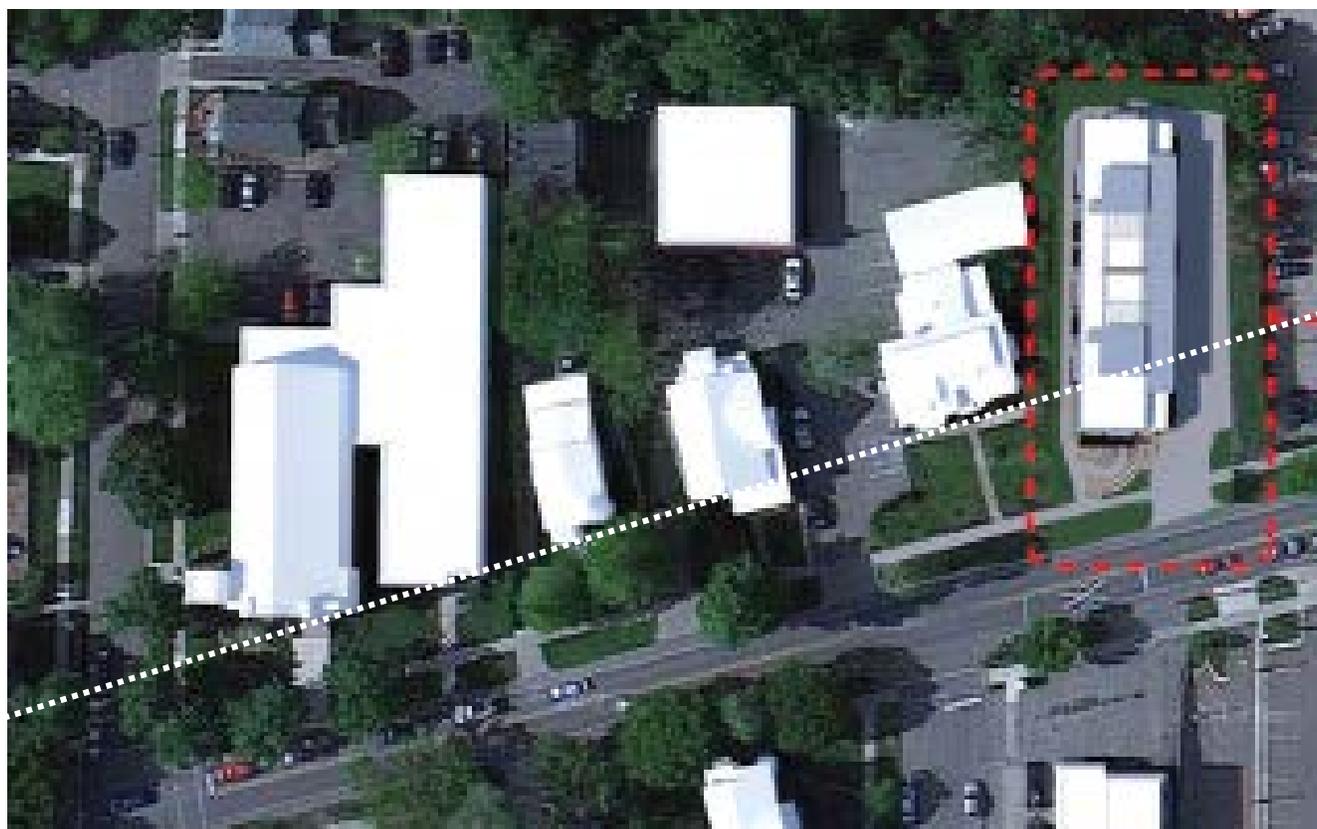
When walking or driving west on West Liberty from downtown, the Brehm House next door would be completely obscured by this building, and the front porch wouldn't be visible, until passersby are directly in front of the new condo building. By following the established front setbacks, the Brehm House will still be mostly obscured, but the front elevation will remain visible from points much farther to the east.

6. Modifications are necessary to the materials, design, and placement of the structure before it will meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines and the Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines. Staff does not recommend approval of this application.

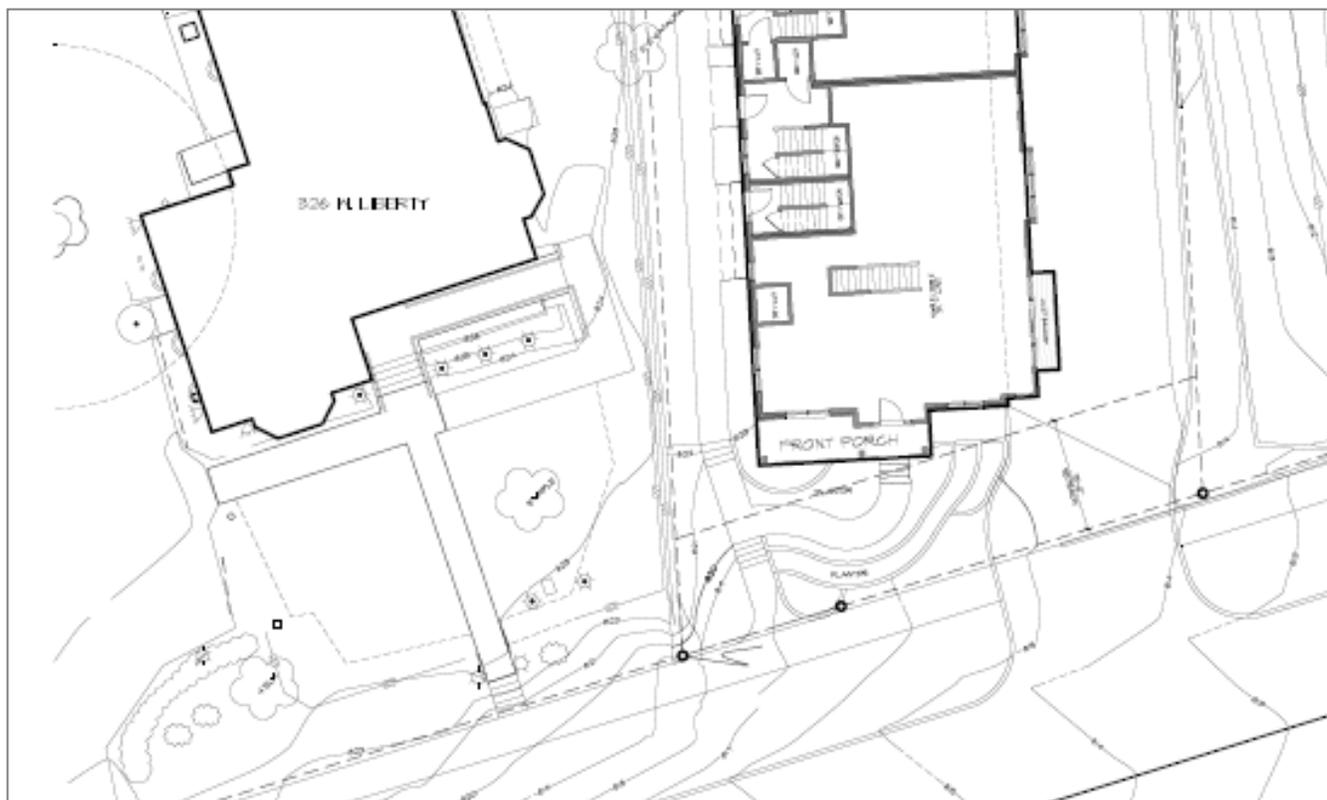
Existing front setback (carwash is on far right)



Proposed front setback



## Detail of front setback



**POSSIBLE MOTIONS:** (Note that the motions are only suggested. The Review Committee, consisting of staff and at least two Commissioners, will meet with the applicant on site and then make a recommendation at the meeting.)

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for 318 West Liberty Street, to demolish a non-contributing car wash and construct an eight-unit condominium building, as proposed. The work is generally compatible in exterior design, arrangement, texture, material and relationship to the rest of the building and the surrounding area and meets *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in particular standards 9 and 10, and the guidelines for District/Neighborhood, and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines*, in particular the guidelines for new construction.

**MOTION WORKSHEET:**

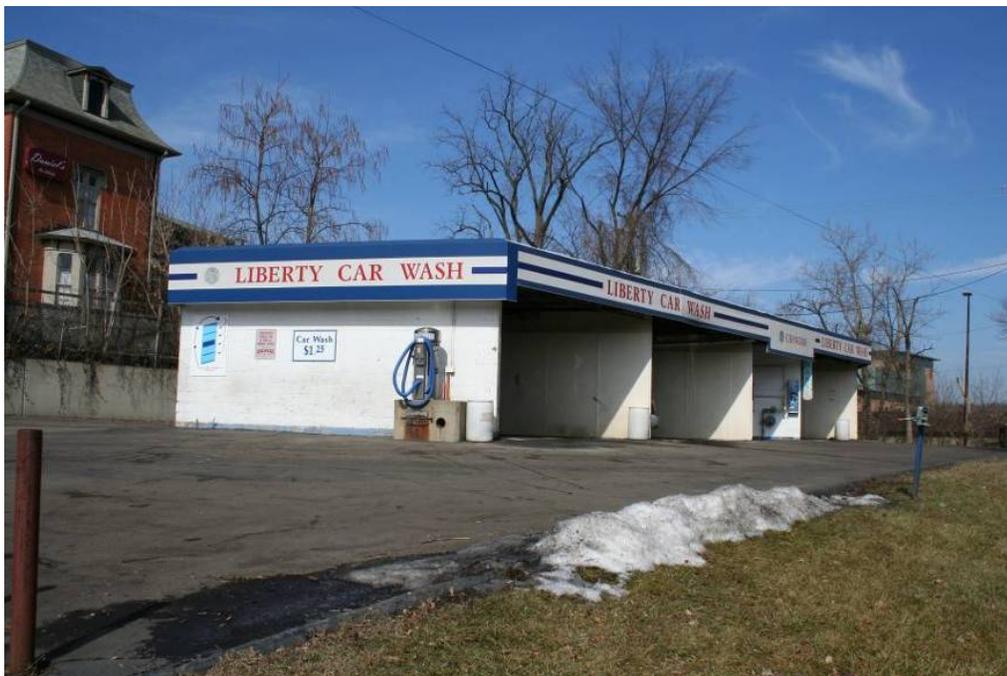
I move that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work at 318 West Liberty in the Old West Side Historic District

\_\_\_\_\_ Provided the following condition(S) is (ARE) met: 1) STATE CONDITION(s)

The work is generally compatible with the size, scale, massing, and materials and meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, standard(S) number(S) (*circle all that apply*): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

**ATTACHMENTS:** application, drawings, photographs

318 West Liberty Street (2008 survey photo)



2010 Aerial Photo

