ANN ARBOR DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: October 9, 2024

PROJECT: DR24-0004 – 303 Detroit Street

ADDRESS: 303 Detroit Street

ZONING: D2 Downtown Interface District (base)
Kerrytown Character (overlay)
Secondary (street type designation)

DESIGN TEAM: MAVD (owner-managers); Reuter Associates Architects (design architect); Huron Contracting LLC (contractor); Macon Engineering LLC (engineer consultant)

LOCATION: This site consists of two connected buildings situated at the southern end of the block bordered by North Fourth Avenue, Catherine Street, and Detroit Street.

Location Map, showing 303 Detroit Street outlined in blue

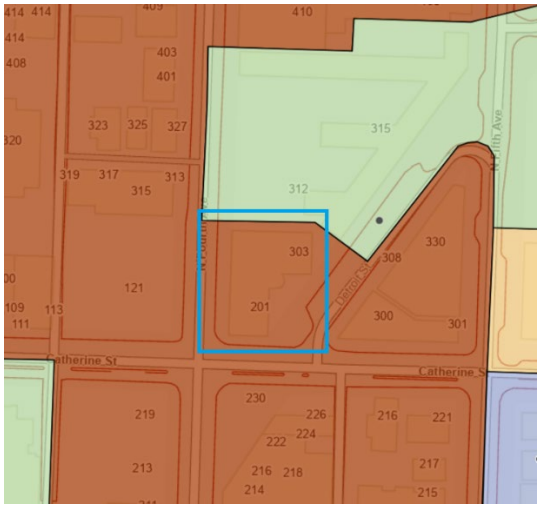
BACKGROUND:
This site has undergone significant development over the past 168 years. It consists of two primary structures: a historic building (Agricultural Hall) from 1856, and a modern addition from 1988. The integration of old and new creates a complex that spans nearly two centuries of local history, blending historic preservation with modern architectural elements. The two buildings are united by an enclosed pedestrian accessway.

The older structure, historic Agricultural Hall, is a three-story brick bearing wall building. Originally serving as an agricultural implement warehouse, it later transitioned to manufacturing farm equipment. Around 1958, the building underwent modifications, including the widening of brick window openings and installation of aluminum windows, coinciding with its repurposing as the White Swan Laundry.

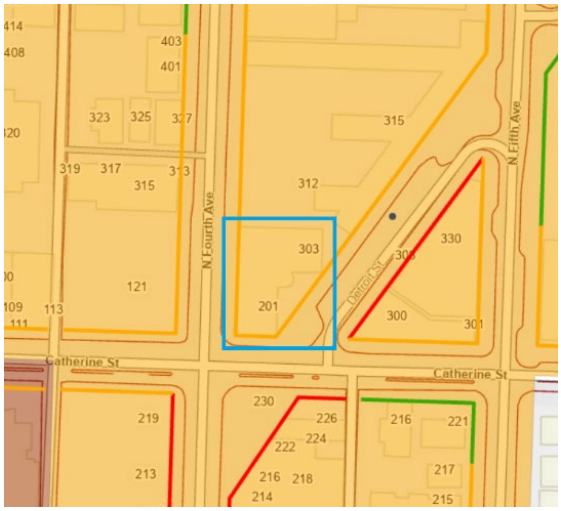
In 1988, the site saw substantial changes. The historic building was extensively renovated for office use, and a new four-story concrete frame building was added to its north side. This modern addition, known as "Market Place" at 303 Detroit Street, features a complementary brick veneer and green curtain wall glazing system. Its design, inspired by architect Frederick Herrmann's style, incorporates a robust concrete base supporting brick walls with distinctive rectangular "punched" windows.

APPLICATION: The application proposes to convert 303 Detroit Street from an office and retail building to a residential building. Construction includes an additional floor on top of the existing buildings, adding balconies to the east side, and creating a parking garage in the basement accessed by a rotating automobile elevator from a new driveway off North Fourth Ave. The additional 10,000 square feet of floor area features glass and aluminum curtain walls to reduce apparent mass and contrast from the existing industrial aesthetic.

ZONING REVIEW: The following table provides a cursory review of the proposed project for compliance with the applicable dimensional standards for the zoning designation in which it is located. This review helps assure that the future site plan associated with the project can be approved substantially as presented.



Base Zoning Map, showing the parcels (outlined in blue) and the D2 zoning (brown overlay)



Overlay Zoning Map with Street Types, showing the parcels (outlined in blue) the Kerrytown Character District (orange overlay), and the Secondary Street Type designation (orange line)

Zoning Review Table

Note: Buildings and additions constructed after December 26, 2009 on lots zoned D1 or D2 in the Downtown Character Overlay Zoning Districts shall comply with the building massing standards in Table 5.17-6, as applicable. 303 Detroit Street was constructed before this date, therefore only the additions proposed must comply with the massing standards.

Dimension	Standard	Review
Lot Area	No minimum	Complies (approx. 11,586 sq ft)
FAR (Floor Area Ratio)	No maximum	Complies (exact information not provided)
Front Setback	0 ft min, 10 ft max at the streetwall	Varies, 0 ft min (existing nonconforming, constructed before Dec 26, 2009)
Front Setback Exceptions (Secondary Street)	Up to 20% of the building frontage may exceed the maximum front setback at the streetwall for entry court or plaza area	Complies (existing nonconforming, constructed before Dec 26, 2009)
Side and Rear Setback	None	Complies
Streetwall Height	2 stories min, 3 stories max	Complies (3 and 4 stories, existing nonconforming, constructed before Dec 26, 2009)
Average Offset at Top of Streetwall	5 ft min	Complies
Height	2 stories min 60 ft max (+30% exception = 78 ft)	Complies (60 ft to flat roof)
Building Module Length (Massing Articulation)	40 ft max	60 ft max (existing nonconforming, constructed before Dec 26, 2009)
Tower Diagonal	N/A	N/A
Building Coverage	80%	Appears to comply (more information needed)
Open Space	10%	Appears to comply (more information needed)

DESIGN GUIDELINES REVIEW: Staff have identified the following design guidelines from the Downtown Ann Arbor Design Guidelines as particularly relevant to the proposed project.

Design Guidelines for Context and Site Planning

A.1 Urban Pattern and Form. When considering urban pattern and form, the petitioner should assess the character of the adjacent streetscape, open spaces, and buildings to determine how they function as places and facilities supporting human use.

The project team's assessment should seek to define opportunities to enrich the design excellence of that project.

A.1.1 Identify and then reinforce the positive characteristics of adjacent sites.

A.1.2 Design sidewalk level features and facilities to provide enrichment of the pedestrian experience.

A.1.3 Corner sites are an opportunity to express an architectural gateway or focal point and a dominant architectural feature.

A.1.5 If the street geometries are such that the mid-block is the termination of a perpendicular street view, consider a design with enough presence and detail to make that view noteworthy.

A.1.6 Where adjacent properties are underdeveloped and/or the block lacks inviting and interesting characteristics, consider a building, site and streetscape design that helps to create a vibrant pedestrian setting.

A.3 Open Space. Open spaces can include public and private courtyards, plazas, patios, terraces, alleys, and gardens. Throughout downtown, site features and elements that invite use should be provided. In commercial areas, open spaces should have an urban quality and character that enliven the street and enhance the pedestrian experience. Outside the commercial core and in civic areas, open spaces may be more park-like settings for human activity. Private property open spaces should be sized relative to the intended use and level of anticipated adjacent pedestrian activity.

A.4 Parking, Driveways and Service Areas. Parking, driveways, and service areas are necessary functions, which should be designed to benefit the urban experience.

A.4.1 Locate and size driveways, access points, service entries, alleys, loading docks, and trash receptacles to minimize impact on pedestrians and maintain pedestrian safety, circulation, and comfort.

A.4.3 Locate a parking structure or a surface parking lot behind or to the side of a building, minimizing the visual presence of parking on adjacent public right-of-way.

Design Guidelines for Buildings

B. 1 Building Massing. Building massing principles address the overall height,

size and shape of a building. Although these guidelines refer to the visual aspects of structures, it is important to note that downtown zoning districts address key building massing considerations including floor area ratio, building height, streetwall height, offset and module length.

B.1.1 Design a building to minimize its impact on adjacent lower-scale areas.

Suggested strategies include:
a) Step taller building elements away from adjacent lower-scale buildings and/or neighborhoods
b) Locate taller building elements at the intersection of streets
c) Provide variation in building massing to reflect the underlying pattern of established lot widths

B.1.2 When a new building will be larger than surrounding structures, visually divide it into smaller building modules that provide a sense of scale.

Suggested strategies include:
a) Vary the height of individual building modules.
b) Vary the height of cornice lines and other roof finish elements.
c) Change wall surface materials, colors or texture.
d) Use vertical moldings to express different building modules.
e) Align projecting features, such as balconies or sun screens, to express different building modules.
f) Use underlying established lot widths to help determine the width of building modules at the street level.

B.1.4 If appropriate to the context, establish a design treatment that includes a differentiated building top.

Suggested strategies include:
a) Use a distinctive cornice line or roof form
b) Change wall surface materials, colors or texture of the building top

Design Guidelines for Building Elements

C.1 Street Edge. Building elements and architectural details used at the street front have a direct impact on the quality of the pedestrian experience and should be combined to create an active and interesting street front. Creative use of materials, textures and architectural details is especially important where there are few windows at the street front of a building.

C.1.1 Use building elements to create a street edge that invites pedestrian activity.

Suggested street edge elements include:
a) First floor canopies that complement the design character of the building and its street front
b) Architectural details that provide a sense of scale
c) Wall surfaces with visually interesting detailing, textures and colors
d) Art features including sculptures, friezes, and murals

C.2 Entries. The location, spacing and general pattern of building entries impact the quality of the pedestrian experience downtown. Building entries should be located to enhance the street level experience and help give a sense of scale. Entries should be clearly defined, accessible, and located to express rhythm and visual interest along a street front. Although traditional building entry designs may be appropriate, creative and contemporary interpretations are also encouraged.

C.2.1 Clearly define a primary entrance and orient it toward the street.

Appropriate strategies include:
a) Create a recessed area that signifies a break in the building wall line
b) Use a canopy or awning positioned over the entry
c) Design a change in wall materials, textures, or colors that frames the entry
d) Include distinctive paving pattern leading to the entry
e) Use accent lighting to define the entry way
f) Locate the entry at the street level

C.5 Materials. Building materials should reinforce the massing and architectural concepts and enhance the character of the building and its context.

C.5.1 Apply materials to provide a sense of scale in proportion to the scale and mass of the building.

C.6 Building Operational Systems. Building operational systems such as waste management, utility services, heating and cooling systems, must be carefully integrated into the design of a building and not detract from the architectural concept.

C.6.1 Integrate solar or wind systems into the design of the top of the building.

C.6.2 Locate and sufficiently screen mechanical systems to minimize or eliminate noise impacts on adjacent sites and buildings.

C.7 Sustainability in Building Elements. Consider sustainability when selecting structural and façade materials and designing functional building elements.

C.7.1 Use sustainable building materials whenever possible. Suggested

materials include:

a) Locally manufactured materials

b) Low maintenance materials

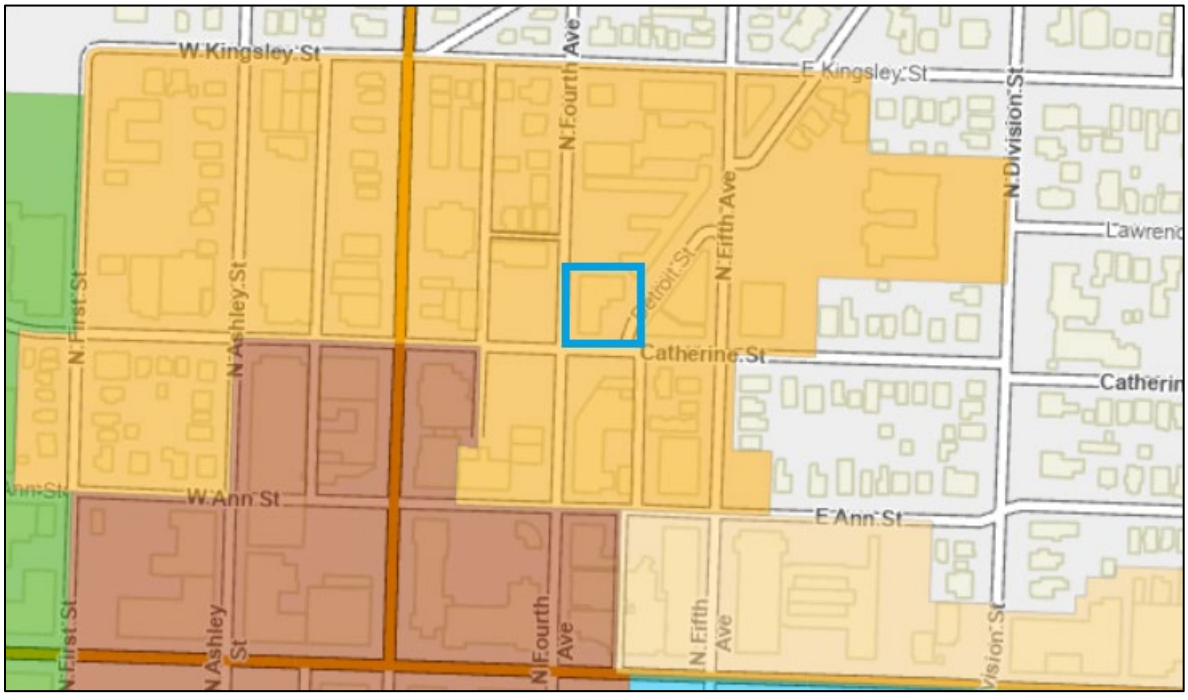
c) Materials with long life spans

d) Such materials do not include toxic or otherwise hazardous materials.

C.7.2 Select and apply building elements to maximize the building's environmental performance.

The Kerrytown Character District

The Kerrytown overlay district frames the north end of downtown and is characterized by a mix of small-scale commercial buildings and houses that have been adapted to different uses. The eastern part of the district is part of the Old Fourth Ward Historic District, while the southeast corner of the district is located in the Fourth/Ann Historic District. The intent for this district is retaining traditional existing building patterns, with lower-scale building modules and residential shapes.



Map showing the Kerrytown Character District in orange and 303 Detroit Street outlined in blue

Design Guidelines for Character Districts

Kerrytown defines the downtown's northern edge and is the transition from commercial

to residential as one moves to the east, north and west – away from the downtown. Two- and three-story Italianate masonry multi-use buildings with zero lot lines give way to late-19th and early-20th century wood-framed housing.

Many consider Kerrytown the home of several Ann Arbor “institutions” in the form of eateries, markets and entertainment venues. It is a lively district by day anchored by a stable retail presence, ample pedestrian elbow room and a variety of vehicular parking options. Kerrytown is a place locals like to frequent.

In the evening Kerrytown becomes more quiet. While Community High School and the Ann Arbor Farmer’s Market provide vitality by day the use of each site recedes to parking at night. Evening activity in Kerrytown is limited to a number of well-spaced dining and entertainment venues in the core area between Detroit Street and Main Street, north of Miller Avenue.

Moving from the core of the Kerrytown Character District and its brick-paved streets into the surrounding neighborhoods, the pedestrian amenities change. The sidewalks transition from continuous hardscape between building facades and the street curb into ribbons of walkway bordered by landscaped setbacks and grassy street extensions. Trees become more prevalent with way-finding signage and lighting levels diminish.

Street Edge Rendering, looking west along Detroit Street at the proposed building

STAFF ANALYSIS:

1. As a transition space between downtown and residential areas of Ann Arbor,

Kerrytown primarily contains two- to four-story residential buildings and commercial buildings, including a number of single-family historic homes. While the proposed 60-foot height of the new building follows guidelines, it is worth noting the proximity of lower height structures. However, given the building's location near the Kerrytown Shops and the ongoing new construction in the area, particularly directly across Detroit Street, the height may soon be contextually appropriate.

2. The design follows the Downtown Design Guidelines for buildings that will be larger than surrounding structures. The façade is broken up into smaller building modules with varying heights, balconies, and building materials. Staff find the streetwall to be an appropriate scale for pedestrians.

3. The project includes open space primarily through private and semi-private plazas and balconies. However, the design should consider not only future residents but also pedestrians and the building's interaction with the adjacent Farmers Market. Kerrytown, particularly directly from the Kerrytown Shops and Ann Arbor Famers Market, is very popular with locals and visitors alike. In addition, the courtyard of Braun Court has historically served as a publicly accessible gathering space.

4. The proposed building has a brick exterior. Staff finds this to be appropriate given the material context of the neighborhood and the prevalence of brick both on buildings and the street. Additions on the upper floors cladded in glass provide a distinctive break from the lower-level design in a complementary way. The proposed construction of balconies in metal accent the existing silo feature.

Attachments: Design Narrative
Design Drawings

Prepared by Julia Shake, Associate Planner
September 30, 2024