

ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Staff Report

ADDRESS: 315-321 South Main Street; HDC16-157

DISTRICT: Main Street Historic District

REPORT DATE: August 11, 2016

REPORT PREPARED BY: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE: Monday, August 8, 2016

OWNER

Name: 315 SMS, LLC
Address: 19727 Allen Road, Suite 1
 Brownstown, MI 48183
Phone: (617) 335-1486

APPLICANT

Mitchell and Mouat Architects, IHC
 113 S. Fourth Street
 Ann Arbor, MI 48104
 (734) 662-6070

BACKGROUND: 315 S Main was the site of a two story brick house until 1962, when the current storefronts were built. Bertha Muehlig lived her entire life (1874-1955) in the house, and she was the third owner of the store at South Main and Washington that opened in 1865 as Bach and Abel, and later, Muehlig's. Muehlig's closed in 1980.

LOCATION: The site is located on the east side of South Main Street, south of East Liberty and north of East William.

APPLICATION: The applicant seeks HDC approval to demolish the existing one-story non-contributing building and construct a six-story mixed-use building in its place.

APPLICABLE REGULATIONS:

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

- (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:

Building Site

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

Designing a constructing a new feature of a building or site when the historic feature is completely missing; or be a new design that is compatible with the historic character of the building and site.

Not recommended: Introducing a new building or site feature that is out of scale or of an otherwise inappropriate design.

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.

Retaining site features that are important to the overall historic character.

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.

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

Not Appropriate: Introducing any new building that is out of scale or otherwise inappropriate to the setting's historic character.

Introducing a new feature that is visually incompatible with or that destroys the patterns of the site or the district.

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 Commercial Settings – This section of Chapter 7 applies.

STAFF FINDINGS:

1. The *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines* chapter on New Construction in Historic Commercial Settings provides the most specific guidance for a new downtown building. In addition to meeting those guidelines, the new construction must also adhere to the *Downtown Ann Arbor Design Guidelines*. (Compliance with those guidelines will be more formally determined when the site plan project is reviewed by City Planning Commission and a determination is made by City Council.) The applicant has experience applying both sets of guidelines, and staff believes the project complies with both. The staff comments below follow the parts of the New Construction in Historic Commercial Settings section of Chapter 7 of the *Historic District Design Guidelines* that most apply.

Site Planning

2. **Site context.** The proposed building is located mid-block amidst contributing historic structures. The proposed building is located along the sidewalk edge, consistent with the rest of the block. The proposal acknowledges the existing site context patterns in the historic district.
3. **Setbacks and Alignment.** The proposed building's setbacks are consistent with neighboring historic properties.

Building Massing

4. **Building height.** The New Construction in Historic Commercial Settings section of the *Historic District Design Guidelines* state that "...if a new building is taller than surrounding historic structures, the taller portion of the building should be stepped back significantly from the streetwall portion of the building." Staff believes that the stepped-back upper story design is compatible with surrounding buildings, and that the depth of the step back is a reasonable distance that preserves that three-story character of the historic structures on the block. Further, staff believes:
 - a. The first floor height reflects traditional first floor heights seen on adjacent historic structures.
 - b. The taller portions of the building are located such that they minimize shading and looming effects on adjacent historic properties.
5. **Building modules and articulation.** Staff finds that by breaking the proposed building into three vertical modules, the historic lot pattern is maintained. Horizontally, the base (first floor), middle (floors two and three), and cap are designed to convey a sense of human scale. The cap is strongest on top of floor six, and its inclusion on top of floor three could potentially improve the design.
6. **Roof form.** The flat roof form is appropriate for Main Street commercial buildings.
7. **Sustainable building massing.** By placing the highest part of the structure at the rear of

the building, there will be less of a shading effect on neighboring historic properties, especially to the south.

Building Elements

8. **Windows.** Careful attention has been paid to the alignment of windows (and other horizontal elements) with others on the block. The size and placement of windows on the first three stories is consistent with the solid-to-void ratios seen on the primary facades of adjacent structures. Staff also believes the storefront windows are modern in design but still reflect the surrounding commercial context.
9. **Entries and canopies.** The three Main Street entrances on the proposed building reinforce historic patterns and are pedestrian-friendly. The fixed canopy proposed over the southern entrance distinguishes it as non-retail (for access to the uses on the upper floors).
10. **Materials.** The three or four complementary types of brick cladding on the most visible portions of the building are historic materials that reflect the surrounding district. The use of Mankato stone on the southern part of the front façade distinguishes the building vertically and is an appropriate contemporary application of a natural material. Though the Design Guidelines specify that "...it is inappropriate to use large panelized products or apply materials to create extensive featureless surfaces", staff believes the steel sheets used as cladding are acceptable because they are on the less visible rear portions of the building.
11. In sum, staff believes that the proposed building is compatible with surrounding historic structures and the Main Street Historic District, and meets both the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines*.

POSSIBLE MOTIONS: (Note that the motion is only a suggestion. 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 the application at 315-321 South Main Street, a non-contributing property in the Main Street Historic District, to demolish the existing one-story building and construct a six-floor mixed-use building, as proposed. The work is compatible in exterior design, arrangement, texture, material and relationship to adjacent and surrounding buildings and meets *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* and the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines*, particularly as they pertain to New Construction in Historic Commercial Settings.

MOTION WORKSHEET:

I move that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work at 315-321 South Main Street in the Main Street 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, background information, drawings, photos

315-321 South Main Street (2007 Survey Photo)

