Ann Arbor Historic District Commission Staff Report

Application Information

Address: 217 North Fifth Avenue.

Application Number: HDC26-0042.

District: Old Fourth Ward Historic District.

Status: Contributing.

Report Date: May 14, 2026.

Report Prepared By: Jill Thacher, City Planner.

Review Committee Date: May 11, 2026.

Owner: Ryan and Sarah Ball.

Owner Address: 2929 Laurentide Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

Owner Phone: (734) 358-8031.

Applicant: Kevin Adkins, Adroom Architecture & Design.

Applicant Address: 8539 Lawrence Ave, Ypsilanti, MI 48197.

Applicant Phone: (734) 646-5934.

Background

Site History: This brick two-story gable-fronter features shingles in the front and rear gables, a wood front porch, one-over-one double hung windows, and small columns flanking the recessed attic windows in each end gable. The house was first occupied in 1900 by John and Pauline Baumgardner. John was the manager of the Ann Arbor Stone Company at the same address, and had one of the city's few telephones installed in the house at that time. Baumgardner's Barn, a few lots down at 301 North Fifth Avenue (corner of Detroit, currently occupied by Jessica's Apothecary), was built in 1887 as part of John Baumgardner's Marble Works. The Baumgardners lived at 217 until 1913 or 1914, when the home was occupied by John Pfisterer, with Matilda C. Pfisterer, teacher at Christian Mack School, listed as a boarder. Matilda, and subsequently Emilie Pfisterer, occupied the house until 1966.

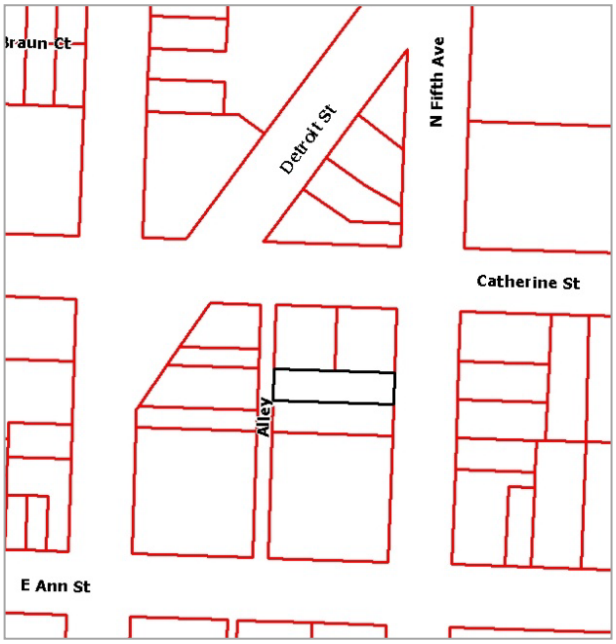
The 1908 and 1916 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps show a small one-story enclosure (room) off the back door. It is not shown on the 1925 Sanborn.

In February of 2013, the HDC issued a certificate of appropriateness to re-work the rear yard, formalize two parking spaces off the alley, and eliminate the driveway. In March of

2013, the HDC issued a certificate of appropriateness to remove the chimney and install two shed dormers. Later in 2013, the HDC denied a Notice to Proceed to replace 24 windows.

Location: The house is located on North Fifth Avenue, north of East Ann Street and south of Catherine Street.

Figure 1: Location map showing 217 N Fifth Avenue outlined in black.



Application: The applicant seeks HDC approval to add a basement egress window near the front of the house on the south elevation.

Applicable Regulations

From the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (other SOI Standards may also apply):

(1) A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

(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 will be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property will be unimpaired.

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

Building Site:

- Recommended*:* Designing new exterior additions to historic buildings or adjacent new construction which is compatible with the historic character of the site and which preserve the historic relationship between a building or buildings, landscape features, and open space.

- Recommended: Identifying, retaining, and preserving buildings and their features as well as features of the site that are important in defining its overall historic character.

- Not Recommended*:* Introducing new construction onto the building site which is visually incompatible in terms of size, scale, design, materials, color and texture or which destroys historic relationships on the site.

- Not Recommended: Removing or radically changing buildings and their features or site features which are important in defining the overall historic character of the building site so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

Windows:

- Recommended*:* Designing and installing additional windows on rear or other non-character-defining elevations if required by the new use. New window openings may also be cut into exposed party walls. Such design should be compatible with the overall design of the building, but not duplicate the fenestration pattern and detailing of a character-defining elevation.

- Recommended: Protecting and maintaining the wood and architectural metal which comprise the window frame, sash, muntins, and surrounds through appropriate surface treatments such as cleaning, rust removal, limited paint removal, and reapplication of protective coating system.

- Not Recommended: Introducing a new design that is incompatible with the historic character of the building.

Health and Safety:

- Recommended*:* Identifying the historic building's character-defining spaces, features, and finishes so that code-required work will not result in their damage or loss.

- Recommended: Complying with health and safety codes, including seismic code requirements, in such a manner that character-defining spaces, features, and finishes are preserved.

- Not Recommended: Altering, damaging, or destroying character-defining spaces, features, and finishes while making modifications to a building or site to comply with safety codes.

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

Windows:

- Appropriate: Retaining and maintaining windows in good condition. Normal maintenance will include cleaning, sash cord replacement, limited paint removal, re-caulking where necessary, and new paint to make windows fully operable.

- Not Appropriate: Changing the number, location, and size or glazing pattern of windows by cutting new openings, blocking-in, or installing replacement sash which does not fit the historic opening.

Safety Codes:

- Appropriate: Complying with barrier free and safety codes in a manner that ensures the preservation of character-defining features.

Staff Findings:

1. The applicant proposes a new egress window well on the south elevation at the front (southeast) corner of the house. It will be an Andersen 100 series Fibrex casement window. There is an existing window opening in this location with the width not specified, but the proposed new window is 29.5” wide and 53 ½” tall. The black metal window well dimensions are not specified; staff has conditioned the motion on the width not exceeding the window opening or 36”, whichever is greater, with a 3 foot horizontal projection from the wall.

2. The proposed egress window would allow a single bedroom to be constructed in the basement. There are other basement windows on the side elevations but for various reasons they are not well suited to egress – the other south elevation window is at the foot of the stairs, and the two north elevation windows toward the back flank an electrical panel and are bookended by the furnace and laundry.

3. The applicant originally proposed placing an egress window roughly halfway between the existing south elevation windows, in a new opening. Since this house has a character-defining cut stone foundation, staff recommended that they utilize the existing opening instead of cutting a new opening in the stone above grade. While staff typically recommends denial of basement egress windows this close to the front, because of the circumstances of this particular building, lot, floorplan and historic materials, staff recommends approval of the application. As conditioned, the materials and dimensions are appropriate.

Possible Motions:

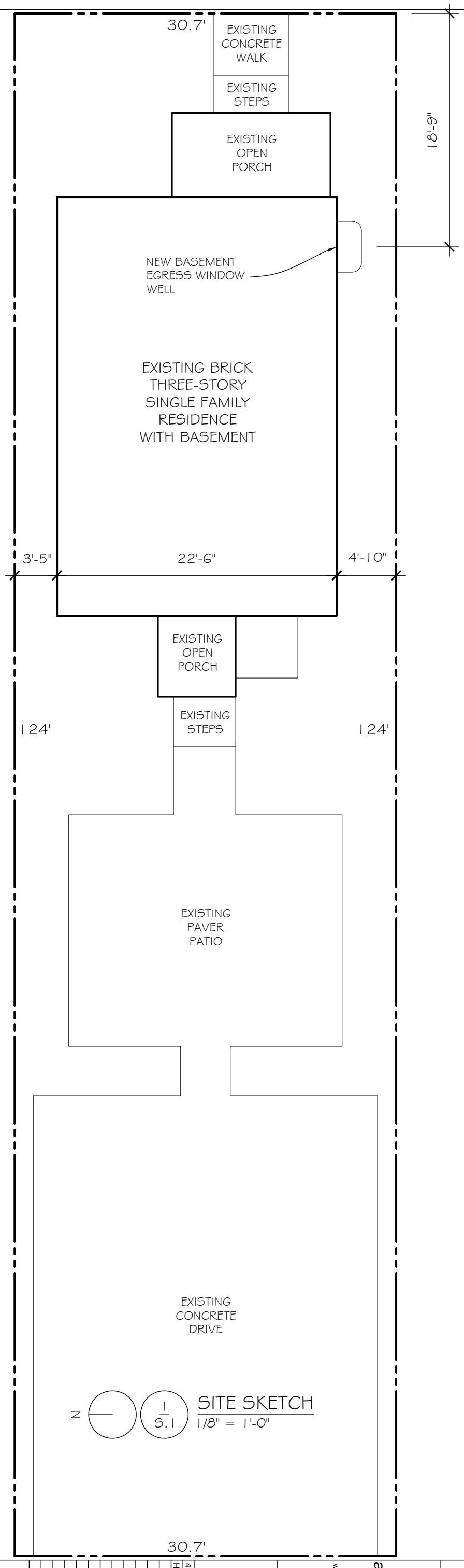
(Note that the motions support staff findings and are only a suggestion. The Review Committee, consisting of staff and at least two Commissioners, will meet with the applicant on site and then make a recommendation at the meeting.)

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for the application at 217 North Fifth Street, a contributing property in the Old Fourth Ward Historic District, to construct a new egress window and well on the south elevation near the front of the house, on the following condition: that the width and horizontal depth of the egress well are the minimum required to span the width of the wall opening while meeting code requirements. As conditioned the work is 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 1, 9 and 10 and the guidelines for building site, windows and health and safety, as well as the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines* for windows and safety codes.

ATTACHMENTS:, drawings, photograph

Image 1: 217 N Fifth Avenue (2023 Survey Photo)

NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION



SITE SKETCH
1/8" = 1'-0"

SCOPE OF WORK:

PARTIAL INTERIOR REMODEL OF BASEMENT WITH NEW BATHROOM & BEDROOM. MODIFY EXISTING WINDOW OPENING FOR EGRESS WINDOW.

ZONING:

D2

DRAWING INDEX:

S.1 - SITE PLAN / NOTES
A.1 - BASEMENT PLANS

S.1

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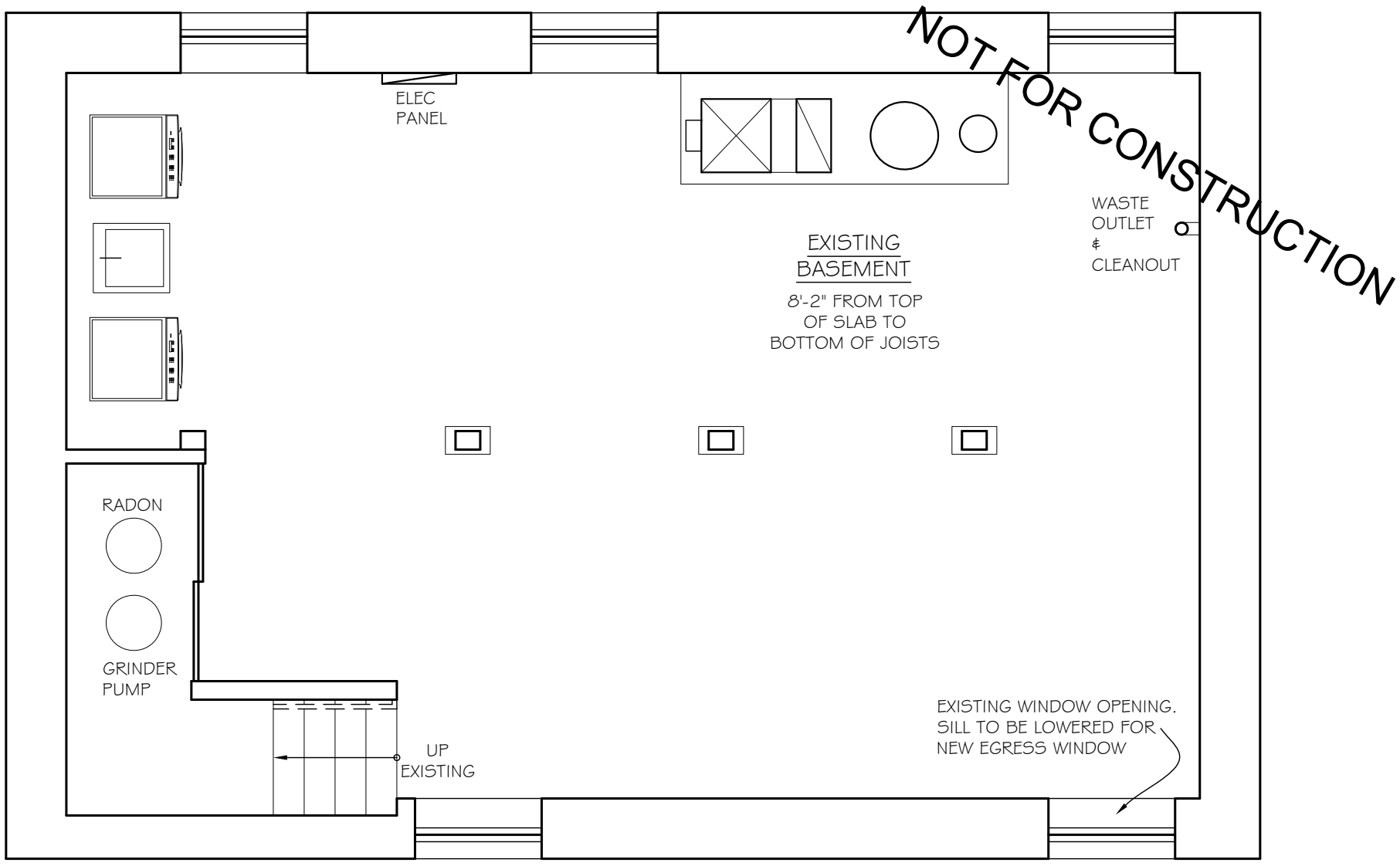
Partial Interior Remodel at:
217 N. 5th Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48104



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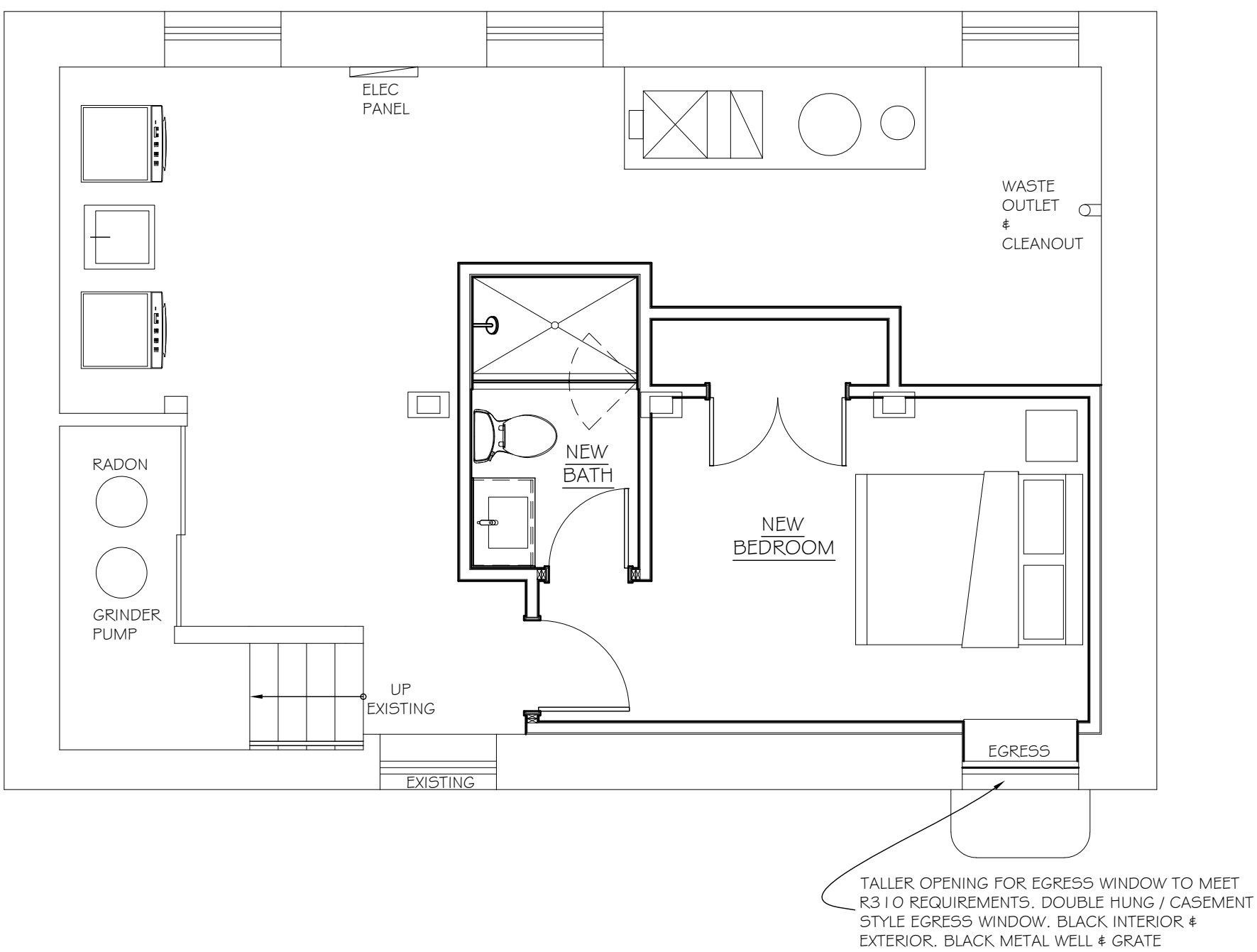
EXISTING/DEMO BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

1/4" = 1'-0"



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2
A.1

PROPOSED BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

1/4" = 1'-0"

A.1

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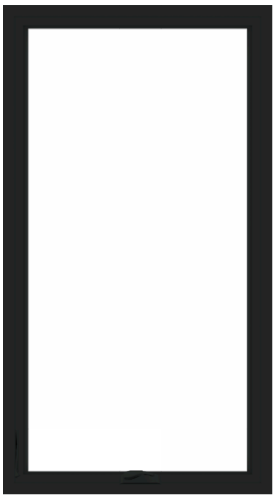
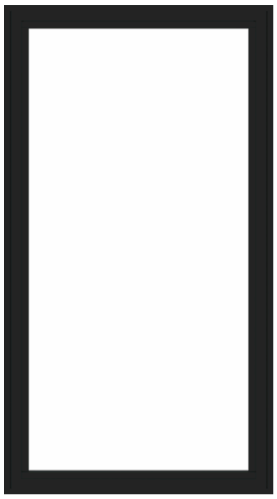
100 SERIES CASEMENT WINDOW



Interior



Exterior

Summary

Product ID#	100CS2646
Unit Width	29 1/2"
Unit Height	53 1/2"
Interior Color	Black
Glass	Low-E Glass

Feedback