

ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Staff Report

ADDRESS: 215 S Main Street, Application Number HDC23-0175

DISTRICT: Main Street Historic District

REPORT DATE: October 12, 2023

REPORT PREPARED BY: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE: Tuesday, October 10, 2023

OWNER

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APPLICANT

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BACKGROUND: The two-bay brick building with a center stair at 215-217 South Main Street was constructed in 1866. It is commercial Italianate in style, with three floors, arch-topped windows (these windows are currently removed), round and segmented arches, and stone trim. The building's cornice is missing. The original occupant of 215 was Richards & Forbes millinery; 217 was occupied by Charles Fantle dry goods.

A working session was held in 2019 to discuss the addition of three stories on top of this three-story building.

At the July 13, 2023 HDC meeting, the portion of an application for a two-story rooftop addition was denied. The portion of that application to replace the second and third floor windows with replica windows and to replace the storefronts was approved. That approved work is shown in this application and does not need to be considered again.

LOCATION: The site is located at the east side of South Main Street, between East Washington and East Liberty Streets.

APPLICATION: The applicant seeks HDC approval to: demolish all but the front façade and side walls of the existing three-story building and construct a new five story building within it, using salvaged brick from the rear of the building to clad three floors of the new rear elevations.

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.
- (5) Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.
- (6) Deteriorated historic features will be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature will match the old in design, color, texture, and where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features will be substantiated by documentary and physical evidence.
- (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):**Alterations/Additions for the new use**

Recommended: Designing additions to roofs such as residential, office, or storage spaces; elevator housing; decks and terraces; or dormers or skylights when required by the new use so that they are inconspicuous from the public right-of-way and do not damage or obscure character-defining features.

Additions

Recommended: Designing new additions in a manner that makes clear what is historic and what is new.

Considering the attached exterior addition both in terms of the new use and the appearance of other buildings in the historic district or neighborhood. Design for the new work may be contemporary or may reference design motifs from the historic building. In either case, it should always be clearly differentiated from the historic building and be compatible in terms of mass, materials, relationship of solids to voids, and color.

Designing additional stories, when required for the new use, that are set back from the wall plane and are as inconspicuous as possible when viewed from the street.

Not Recommended: Designing a new addition so that its size and scale in relation to the historic building are out of proportion, thus diminishing the historic character.

Duplicating the exact form, material, style, and detailing of the historic building in the new addition so that the new work appears to be part of the historic building.

District or Neighborhood Setting

Recommended: Designing and constructing new additions to historic buildings when required by the new use. New work should be compatible with the historic character of the setting in terms of size, scale, design, material, color, and texture.

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

Storefronts

Recommended: Designing and constructing a new storefront when the historic storefront is completely missing. It may be an accurate restoration using historical, pictorial, and physical documentation; or may be a new design that is compatible with the size, scale, and material of the historic building. New designs should be flush with the façade and be kept as simple as possible.

The removal of inappropriate, non-historic cladding, false mansard roofs, and other later alterations can help reveal the historic character of a storefront.

Not Recommended: Introducing a new design that is incompatible in size, scale, material, and color.

Creating a false historical appearance because the replaced storefront is based on insufficient historical, pictorial, and physical documentation.

Building Exterior: Windows

Recommended: Replacing in kind an entire window that is too deteriorated to repair using the same sash and pane configuration and other design details. If using the same kind of material is not technically or economically feasible when replacing windows deteriorated beyond repair, then a compatible substitute material may be considered.

Not Recommended: Removing or radically changing windows which are important in defining the overall historic character of the building so that, as a result, the character is diminished.

Removing a character-defining window that is unrepairable and blocking it in; or replacing it with a new window that does not convey the same visual appearance.

Building Site – Alterations, Additions

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.

Masonry – Identify, Retain, Preserve

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

Replacing or rebuilding a major portion of exterior masonry walls that could be repaired so that, as a result, the building is no longer historic and is essentially new construction.

Setting

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

From the Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines:

Additions to Historic Commercial Structures

Appropriate: Placing additions such as balconies on non character-defining elevations and limiting the number, size and scale in relationship to the historic building.

When required, designing additional stories that are set back from the front and side wall planes and are as inconspicuous as possible when viewed from the street.

Not Appropriate: Designing an addition that overpowers or dramatically alters the original building through size, height, or materials.

New Construction in Historic Commercial Settings

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. The application proposes to demolish the building, leaving the three-story South Main Street façade and the interior side walls intact. The north elevation would be extruded outward (east) around 10' at the rear of the building. A new five-story building would be constructed inside of these three walls. The front façade would receive new reproduction windows to fit the existing openings, and two new storefront systems would be installed (per a previous application). The rear elevation would be salvaged brick from the rear wall and rear wing for the first three floors, and split-faced block on floors four and five. The height of the building would be increased to 70' from the current 35'. The fronts of

the fourth and fifth floors are flush and set back 19' from the front parapet.

2. [Preservation Brief 14: New Exterior Additions to Historic Buildings](#) offers helpful advice from the National Park Service. They note on page 2, "A new addition to a historic building should preserve the building's historic character. To accomplish this and meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, a new addition should:
 - Preserve significant historic materials, features and form;
 - Be compatible; and
 - Be differentiated from the historic building.
 Staff notes that this work would demolish all of the building's historic materials except three exterior walls plus salvaged historic bricks.
3. Regarding rooftop additions, Preservation Brief 14 goes on to say, on page 12, "Generally, a rooftop addition should not be more than one story in height to minimize its visibility and its impact on the proportion and profile of the historic building. A rooftop addition should almost always be set back at least one full bay from the primary elevation of the building, as well as from the other elevations if the building is free-standing or highly visible." Later on page 12, "Constructing another floor on top of a small, one, two or three-story building is seldom appropriate for buildings of this size as it would measurably alter the building's proportions and profile, and negatively impact its historic character."
4. Italianate commercial buildings typically have flat or low-slope roofs. It is important to maintain this character-defining feature of the building at the original third story.
5. Staff notes that the proposed two-story addition is set back 19' from the front parapet, while each bay of the two-bay building (not counting 6' for the center entry) is 19' wide. Looking at the perspective drawing and renderings in the packet, the fourth floor is not visible at 19' from across the street and unobtrusive from the two nearby intersections. The fifth floor is still visible from the intersections.
6. Staff discussed reusing historic brick from the rear elevations of the building with the applicants at a site visit after the last HDC meeting where an application was considered for this building. Staff's advice was to use the historic brick as cladding over new materials (probably CMU), if rebuilding the rear wall(s) was structurally necessary. Letters from a structural engineer describe deficiencies in the three-story rear wall, but not the two-story rear wing. Rebuilt walls should be in the same plane and footprint, with openings that match the historic ones, and with the original/current height of the rear of the building denoted. This would be an appropriate way to mark the original rear (northeast) corner of the building.

Unfortunately, while the 215 S Main portion of the rear elevation has proposed window openings that match the locations of historic openings (though the sizes are a little different), that wall has been pulled around 10' farther east than where it exists now. This means the original rear corner of the building is not expressed. Further, on the 217 S Main section the first three floors of the rear addition use reclaimed brick, despite this rear wing currently only being two stories, and with none of the openings replicated.

7. This application is closer to meeting the standards and guidelines used by the HDC than the previous application. The two areas with room for improvement are the fifth floor, which would be less visible (and more inconspicuous) if it were stepped further back, and the work on the rear of the building. On the rear, the separation of brick and block are an improvement. The two-story rear wing's outer walls should remain, and the reclaimed brick used to rebuild the three-story rear wall that is structurally compromised. Existing wall heights and footprints should be honored, as well as window openings. Where multiple openings exist or existed, reusing the ones that are logical for the project while leaving a record of the others is appropriate.
8. Staff advised the applicant in a preliminary meeting and previous staff report not to propose demolishing the building behind the front facade. The applicant responded by retaining the two side walls. Demolishing the building within three exterior walls is not appropriate and is not in keeping with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation numbers 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, or 10.

POSSIBLE MOTIONS: (Three motions are proposed, for the three work items in the application. 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 215-217 South Main Street, a contributing property in the Main Street Historic District, to demolish all but the front façade and side walls of the existing building and construct a new five story building within those three walls while using salvaged brick from the rear of the building to clad three floors of the new rear elevations; as proposed. 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 *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines*, especially for additions to commercial buildings, new construction, and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in particular standards 1, 2, 5, 6, 9 and 10 and the guidelines for alterations/additions for a new use, additions, district or neighborhood setting, building site, masonry, and setting.

MOTION WORKSHEET:

I move that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work at 215-217 S 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: photos, drawings, window assessment letter, engineering letters

Kessel's Store Front Gets Remodeled, May 1949 (AADL Old News)

