

ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

Staff Report

ADDRESS: 215 S Main Street, Application Number HDC23-0056

DISTRICT: Main Street Historic District

REPORT DATE: July 13, 2023

REPORT PREPARED BY: Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE: Monday, July 10, 2023

	OWNER	APPLICANT
Name:	Reza Rahmani 215-217 SMS, LLC	Chris Biggers Bigg Designs LLC
Address:	19727 Allen Rd, Suite 11 Brownstown, MI 48183	131 E Commerce St Milford, MI 48381
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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 June 8, 2023 HDC meeting, the application was postponed to July 13, 2023 because new drawings were submitted the day of the meeting.

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; replace the two storefronts with new storefront systems; and replace the second- and third-floor windows on the front façade with replica windows.

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.

Storefronts

Appropriate: Designing and construction 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.

Not Appropriate: Introducing new production or salvaged architectural elements that were not historically part of the building.

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

Installing a new storefront that is incompatible in size and material with the historic building and 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. 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. Staff has divided the comments below into these three major work items.

Building Demo/Reconstruction

2. The application proposes to demolish the three-story east/rear façade, the roof, and everything interior of the three-story brick front and side walls. A new five-story building would then be constructed within the three remaining exterior walls. The height of the building would be increased to 70' from the current 35'. The fourth floor is set back 8' from the front parapet, and the fifth floor is set back an additional five feet.
3. [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. Further, the additional two stories are not compatible because they are highly visible and change the character of the three-story building in the center of a row of three story buildings.

4. 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."

Staff notes that the proposed two-story addition is set back 8' and 13' 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 in the packet (HDC-3.15), if the fourth floor were set back 19', it would not be visible from across the street. A fifth floor would need to be set back significantly farther.

5. 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.
6. Staff advised the applicant in a preliminary meeting 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.

7. The two additional stories are too close to the front façade. In order to be invisible or nearly so from the public right of way (in all places, not just directly across the street), they need to be set back farther and the height may need to be lower. Again, *Preservation Brief 14* should be consulted. The proposed setbacks from the front parapet are 8 and 13 feet. Both additional stories are visible from the street. This changes and negatively impacts the character of the three-story building and also the character of this block of three-story commercial buildings.
8. Staff believes the proposed work is very conspicuous from the public right of way and could be made considerably less conspicuous. The size and scale are out of proportion and diminish the historic character of the building. The new work is not compatible with the three-story character of the historic building and its historic setting.

Storefronts

9. The storefronts on both 215 and 217 are not original. 215's is modern, angled, and wouldn't meet the current design guidelines. The storefront at 217 is not original but is a compatible design for the historic building. Cladding on the columns flanking the center entry door and on the outer corners of the building is proposed to be removed. This will expose four stacked stone columns that are historic architectural features.
10. The new design is simple and compatible. Each bay consists of a new aluminum storefront system that is inset 3' from the sidewalk with wood trim over the vertical mullions, an aluminum door with a wood paneled entry wall, and transoms running the width. The full-lite door in the center of the building is fixed shut. There is a tile kickplate below the windows, and the 3' inset floor is tiled. A sign band with a wood cornice runs the width of the building. This work is a partial restoration and the modern storefronts are simple and compatible with compatible historic proportions.
11. No lighting is proposed on the building or storefront.

Windows

12. The original second-story windows on the front façade were four-over-four and the openings feature shallow arches and hood moldings. These windows appear in older photographs but were replaced sometime prior to 1949 with one-over-one windows with a transom above. Replacing them with wood arch-topped four-over-four windows that fit the openings is very appropriate.
13. The tall, round-topped third floor windows have round hood moldings. They originally featured fancy arched-top two-over-two (or four-over-four?) windows that can be seen in Google Street View photos from June of 2021 (at end of staff report). The building owner removed the sashes because of excessive damage and stored them in the building. Currently only storm windows protect the window openings. (The half-circles that fill in the round tops appear to be to make the storm windows fit in the openings.)

14. The historic sashes that were removed were assessed by Charlie Pullum, President of the Pullum Window Corporation, a general and historic reproduction window supplier. Mr. Pullum declared them unrepairable.
15. The window worksheets submitted have identical measurements for the existing and proposed windows. The new windows will be custom built replicas of the existing. The work will be done by Pella.
16. The current proposal to replace the windows on the front façade with custom built replica windows is appropriate.

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.)

Demolition/New Construction:

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for the portion of 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; 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.

Storefronts:

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for the portion of the application at 215-217 South Main Street, a contributing property in the Main Street Historic District, to replace the two non-original storefronts with new storefronts, 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 storefronts, 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 district or neighborhood setting, storefronts, masonry, and setting.

Windows:

I move that the Commission issue a certificate of appropriateness for the portion of the application at 215-217 South Main Street, a contributing property in the Main Street Historic District, to replace the two non-original storefronts with new storefronts, 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 windows, and the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, in particular standards 1, 2, 5, and 6 and the guidelines for windows.

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)

