

## ANN ARBOR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

### Staff Report

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

**DISTRICT:** Main Street Historic District

**REPORT DATE:** June 8, 2023

**REPORT PREPARED BY:** Jill Thacher, Historic Preservation Coordinator

**REVIEW COMMITTEE DATE:** Monday, June 5, 2023

	<b>OWNER</b>	<b>APPLICANT</b>
<b>Name:</b>	Reza Rahmani 215-217 SMS, LLC	Chris Biggers Bigg Designs LLC
<b>Address:</b>	19727 Allen Rd, Suite 11 Brownstown, MI 48183	131 E Commerce St Milford, MI 48381
<b>Phone:</b>	(734) 657-3000	(248) 886-4460

**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.

**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 of the existing three-story building and construct a new five story building behind the front façade; replace the two storefronts with new storefront systems; and replace the second- and third-floor windows with new 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 only the South Main Street façade intact. A new five-story building would be constructed behind the front façade. 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 states: “After surveying the site, it has been determined that the building behind the façade is unusable due to its very old neglected wood structure layout, multiple levels within, lack of accessibility and code compliant egress routes (stairs) make it impossible for the building to function as a single unit. Office space has become excessive, therefore, it is proposed to rebuild floors for future first floor commercial tenants and residential units on the floors above. The existing construction of the façade will remain, being supported by a new steel tube system behind it. The new building will be block and steel construction in the same footprint of the original.”
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.
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.”
5. Italianate commercial buildings typically have flat roofs. In order to retain the sense of a three story, flat-roofed building, staff believes any additional floor must be pushed back significantly from the existing front parapet.
6. Staff advised the applicant in a preliminary meeting not to propose demolishing the building behind the front facade. Demolishing the building behind the front façade 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 (one full bay would be approximately 25 feet) and the height may need to be lower. Again, *Preservation Brief 14* should be consulted. The proposed setback from the front parapet is approximately 8 feet. This gives the addition a looming quality and changes the character of the three-story building and also the character of this block of three-story commercial buildings.

## **Windows**

8. 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.
9. 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.)
10. 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.
11. The window worksheets submitted had identical measurements for the existing and proposed windows. This implies that the new windows will be custom built replicas of the existing. Information on Pella replacement windows is also provided, however, and these windows do not match the style of the third-floor sashes – the muntins that form the top arches are shallower and not as rounded as the historic ones. The Pellas are also four-over-four sashes with equal-width muntins. The historic sashes were either two-over-two or had very thin center muntins that made them four-over-four. It is difficult to tell from historic photos; there may be physical evidence of a center muntin on the historic window sashes. Staff emailed the applicant about the windows and has not heard back as of this writing.
12. The current proposal to replace the windows with Pella windows that do not match the muntin configuration does not meet the Historic District Design Guidelines and is not appropriate. Staff has proposed an additional motion about the windows; if the proposed window work is not approved, it would allow staff to approve wood replacement windows that meet the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines*.

## **Storefronts**

13. 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 is proposed to be removed. This will expose two stacked stone columns that are historic architectural features. Two columns that should still exist on the outer edges of the building are not proposed to be exposed. It is not clear whether the outer columns and the sign band would retain their current cladding or be replaced with something else.
14. The new design incorporates design elements from the pre-1865 storefront (see photo on attachments sheet SD-3). The tall, arch topped design with a circle element pre-dated the

manufacturing of large sheets of glass that defined later storefronts. It is difficult to incorporate these early design elements without doing an actual replication of the original storefront. For example, in the pre-1865 photo the doors for each address were recessed in the center of the storefront. In the new design, 215 has a door on the left and 217 has no door at all. Instead it uses the door in the center of the building that historically lead upstairs. Other design elements from before 1865 include a bracketed cornice on top of the storefronts, and a stone arch over the center door that is presumed to be lost to the current glass block transom. Using a single design element, the arch-topped storefront windows, is conjectural in that it provides incomplete information on what the pre-1865 storefront really looked like. Staff recommends that the design should be either a complete replication (best) or partially replicates the early storefront (so that it may be completed later). Varying these elements with different widths and door locations confuses the historic record. Another approach would be to provide simple and compatible storefronts that use historic proportions for a building of this age.

15. The elevation drawing notes several sidewalk up-lights. Uplighting is not appropriate to add to historic storefronts. Fortunately, there is a large five-globe streetlight immediately in front of the building.

**POSSIBLE MOTIONS:** (Note that the motion supports staff findings and 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 215-217 South Main Street, a contributing property in the Main Street Historic District, to demolish all but the front façade of the existing building and construct a new five story building behind the front façade; replace the two storefronts with new storefront systems; and replace the second- and third-floor windows with new windows, 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 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 alterations/additions for a new use, additions, district or neighborhood setting, storefronts, windows, building site, masonry, and setting.

*If the above motion does not pass:*

I move that the Commission authorizes staff to approve, because of their deteriorated condition and on the Commission's behalf, replacement windows on the second and third floors of the front façade of 215-217 South Main Street, a contributing property in the Main Street Historic District, on the condition that the windows are wood and meet the *Ann Arbor Historic District Design Guidelines*.

**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 letter

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

