

# Gandy Dancer Historic Study

401 Depot St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Prepared by Stantec for The Roxbury Group  
2026.03.18



# Summary

This document is an overview of the history, preservation efforts, and regulatory actions concerning the Michigan Central Depot, now the Gandy Dancer Restaurant, at 401 Depot Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan and the surrounding area. Built in 1886 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style by architects Spier and Rohns, the Depot was celebrated as one of the finest stations on the Michigan Central line. Its robust stone construction, stained glass, and terracotta fireplaces reflected the railroad's prestige at its peak.

After serving as a rail hub for decades, the building was purchased in 1969 by the C.A. Muer Corporation and converted into the Gandy Dancer Restaurant, with careful renovations to preserve its historic character. The property became a focal point for Ann Arbor's historic preservation movement, leading to its inclusion in the Division Street Historic District and the National Register of Historic Places.

The archives of the building details numerous proposals and controversies regarding additions and alterations to the building, especially as the restaurant's needs evolved. These include expansions for kitchen and dining space, the addition of awnings and vestibules, and the relocation of service elements like coolers and trash enclosures. Each proposal was subject to rigorous review by the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission, which balanced the needs of the business with the preservation of the building's architectural integrity.

The Depot's story is also intertwined with broader issues such as Amtrak service, commuter needs, and the evolution of Ann Arbor's urban landscape. The Depot is not only architecturally significant but also played a central role in Ann Arbor's history as a gateway for visitors, dignitaries, and university guests. Notable figures such as Winston Churchill, Grover Cleveland, Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and John F. Kennedy passed through its doors. The building's name, "Gandy Dancer," is itself a nod to railroad history referring to the workers who maintained the tracks, using tools from the Gandy Tool Company.

# Timeline

1839	First Michigan Central Railroad depot built in Ann Arbor.
1886	Current Michigan Central Depot constructed in Richardsonian Romanesque style; opened in March 1887. Designed by Spier & Rohns.
1969	C.A. Muer Corporation purchases the depot from Penn Central Railroad and begins restaurant renovations.
1975	Depot added to Historic District and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Major addition connects the main building to the east baggage building, expanding kitchen and dining space.
1990	New entrance canopy and fabric awning between main building and Express Office.
1997	Relocating kitchen coolers, trash compactors, and constructing new fences and enclosures.
2001	Modifications, including a storage shed and vestibule.
2008	Approval for roof repairs, matching existing materials and details.

## Residential Buildings

- 1 Wil-Dean and Duncan Manor Apartments (1928)
- 2 Kingsley Apartments (1929)
- 3 Phi Rho Sigma Fraternity (1929)

## Religious Buildings

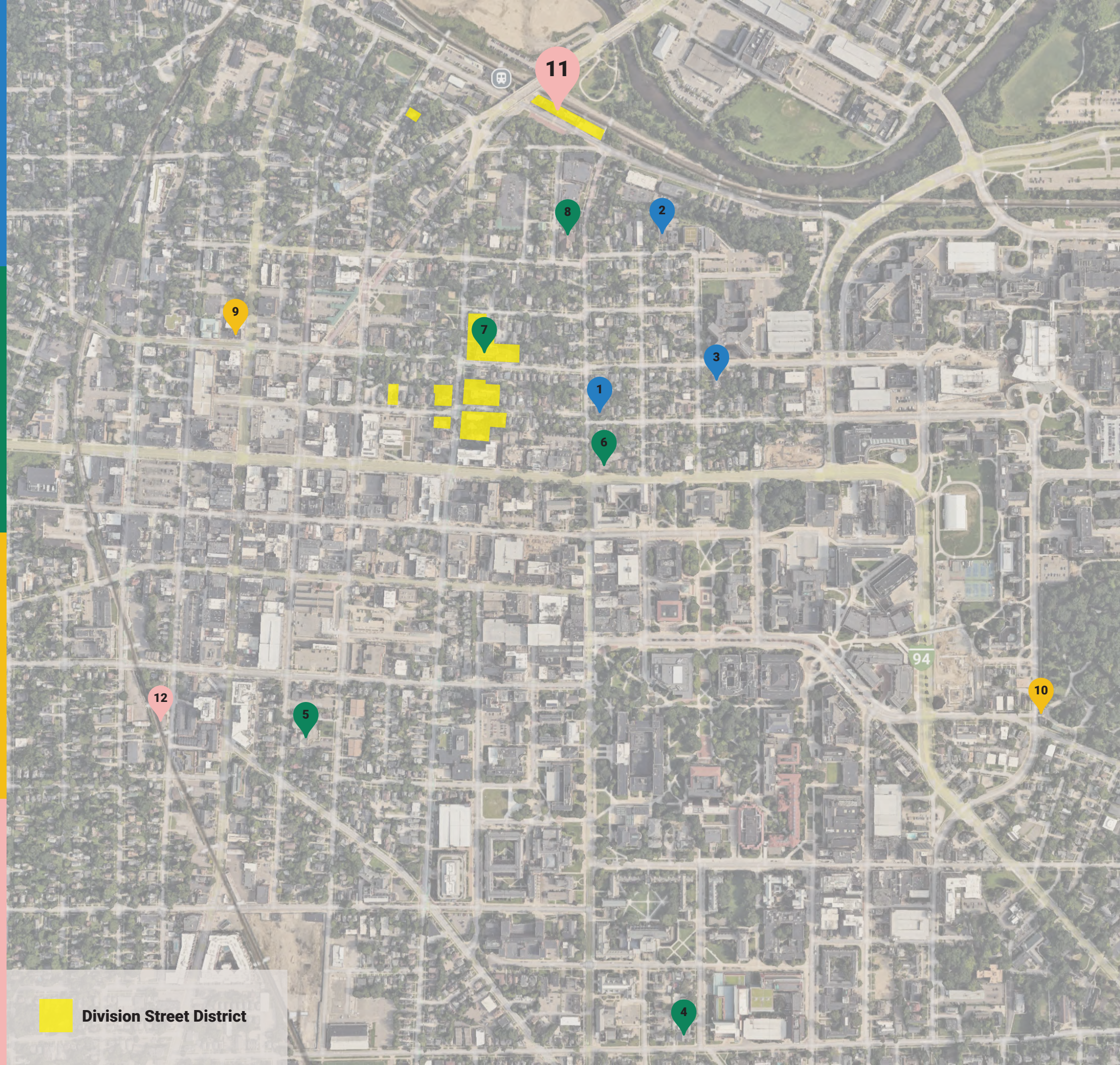
- 4 Memorial Christian Church (1891)
- 5 Bethlehem Church (1895-96)
- 6 First Unitarian Church (1882)
- 7 St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (1869)
- 8 St. Thomas the Apostle (1899, 1902, 1911, 1929)


## Civic & Commercial

- 9 Dr. Chase's Steam Printing House (1864/1868)
- 10 Forest Hill Cemetery (1858 & 1867)

## Transportation / Adaptive Reuse

- 11 Michigan Central Railroad Depot, Gandy Dancer (1886)
- 12 Toledo, Ann Arbor and Northern Michigan Railway Depot (c.1973)



 Division Street District

# St. Thomas the Apostle

1899, 1902, 1920, 1950

Type: Church, rectory, convent, school  
Style: Romanesque, Georgian Colonial Revival

*Granite fieldstone, Bailey bluestone, marble pillars, stained-glass rose window, Ionic columns, green clay tile roof, pedimented dormers. Monument to Irish and German Catholic immigration, eclectic complex built under Father Kelly's leadership*



# Wil-Dean and Duncan Manor Apartments

1928

Type: High-density apartment buildings  
Style: Tudor Revival

*Steeply sloping roof lines, half-timbered gables, round arched entries, tapestry brick, slate roofs, pierced brickwork, color tiles, sandstone details, multi-paned steel casement windows. Built to accommodate Ann Arbor's growing student and medical population.*



# Kingsley Apartments

1929

Type: Apartment building  
Style: Mediterranean Revival with Moorish overtones

*Multi-colored stone entry, Islamic arches, orange brick, terracotta panels, diamond-shaped accents in glazed tile, tapestry brick panels, black wrought-iron railings. Designed by R.S. Gerganoff, houses many nurses and medical students due to proximity to hospitals. Offers views of the Huron River Valley.*



# Phi Rho Sigma Fraternity

1929

Type: Fraternity house  
Style: English Tudor overtones

*Sandstone laid in random ashlar, wood half-timbers, tapestry brick, rough slate roof, leaded glass, oriel windows, quatrefoil designs, steel joists, stone/brick/hollow tile walls. Built for a medical fraternity, later transitioned to a coed medical society. The building was physically moved to a new site in 1949.*



# St. Andrew's Episcopal

1869

Type: Church  
Style: English Gothic Revival

*Field boulders, stone Greek cross, diamond-patterned slate roof, clerestory windows, stained glass by Tiffany, walnut eagle lectern. Oldest church building in continuous use in Ann Arbor, included in the Division Street Historic District, subject to ongoing preservation and restoration*



# First Unitarian Church

1882

Type: Church  
Style: Romanesque,

*Stonework, squat tower, tall chimney, stained glass, Tiffany window, reading room. Hosted significant social movements, later restored and repurposed as offices.*



# Dr. Chase's Steam Printing House

1864/1868

Type: Commercial/printing house  
Style: Italianate

*Brick construction, corbelled arcading, round and segmental window hoods, dentate brickwork. Site of major publishing industry, later repurposed for various businesses, notable for its role in Ann Arbor's downtown restoration movement.*



# Bethlehem Church

1864-1896

Type: Church  
Style: Richardsonian Romanesque with Gothic features

*Native fieldstone, Gothic variation, annex added in 1935. Oldest German church in Michigan, recognized by the State and marked for its sesquicentennial*

# Toledo, Ann Arbor and Northern Michigan

1973

Type: Railway depot (now Montessori school)  
Style: Clapboard structure, hipped roof, ornamental brackets

15-foot ceilings, three tiers of wall paneling, wooden archway with carved floral columns, preserved waiting room. Adaptive reuse from depot to various businesses, restored for educational use.



# Michigan Central Railroad Depot, Gandy Dancer

1886

Type: Railroad station (now restaurant)  
Style: Richardsonian Romanesque

Architects Spier and Rohns designed the new building in 1886 in the popular Richardsonian Romanesque style. The heavy stone walls, deep-set, round-arched openings, the asymmetry of the composition with its square squat tower and tall chimney, all expressed the strength, solidity, and prestige of the railroad, then at the zenith of its power. Stained glass windows and two large terra cotta fireplaces further embellished the interior. The contractors took special care in the choice and fitting of the stone, which was quarried a short distance up the Huron River at Foster's Station on Maple Road. The two smaller buildings, a Railway Express office and a baggage station, were connected to the central structure by a low metal canopy running along the track side. (3, Michigan Central Railroad Depot, Gandy Dancer, 1886 \_ Ann Arbor District Library.pdf)



# Forest Hill Cemetery

1858 & 1867

Type: Cemetery  
Style: Romantic/Picturesque

Varied topography, curved paths, Gothic Revival gatehouse and caretaker's house, lancet windows, slate roofs, quatrefoil window, wavy bargeboards. Inspired by Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Ann Arbor's major burial site for prominent citizens, retains much original design.

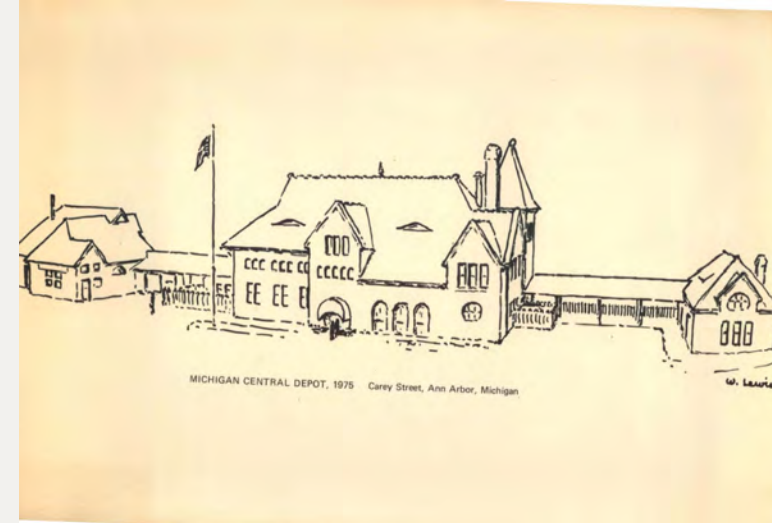


# Memorial Christian Church

1891

Type: Church  
Style: Shingle Style (American Queen Anne derivative)

Stone ground story, red slate upper walls, pews arranged for group unity, spectacular rose windows. Built for the Disciples of Christ congregation, relocated and reconstructed by the University of Michigan in 1925.



# Summary

The buildings represent a wide range of styles - Tudor Revival, Mediterranean Revival, Richardsonian Romanesque, English Gothic, Italianate, Shingle Style, and Colonial Revival. Common materials include fieldstone, brick, slate, sandstone, and decorative tile, often chosen for durability and aesthetic impact. Several buildings have been repurposed (depots to schools/restaurants, churches to offices), reflecting Ann Arbor's commitment to preservation and functional adaptation. Many structures are tied to the city's social, religious, and educational history, serving as landmarks for immigrant communities, university growth, and civic development. The Historic district commission and locals have played key roles in maintaining architectural integrity and adapting buildings for modern use.



# Building Heights Analysis

Buildings within a 0.4 miles radius of the Gandy Dancer with more than seven stories.

- 1 1000 Wall St, Ann Arbor, MI 48105
- 2 1100 Broadway St, Ann Arbor, MI 48105
- 3 1200 Broadway St, Ann Arbor, MI 48105
- 4 1050 Wall St, Ann Arbor, MI 48105
- 5 1150 W Medical Center Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48109
- 6 300 N Ingalls St, Ann Arbor, MI 48109
- 7 615 E Huron St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
- 8 603 E Huron St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
- 9 505 E Huron St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
- 10 413 E Huron St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
- 11 Future nine story Hotel
- 12 Future six story Condo



# Building Heights Analysis

The immediate area of the Gandy Dancer consistent of streets with substantial grade change and varying building types and age. The corner stone buildings in the section shown below are the Gandy Dancer and St. Thomas the Apostle designed by Spier & Rohns both in Richardsonian Romanesque style. The Historic buildings overlay in the area consist of the Division Street district and Old Fourth Ward. The St. Thomas the Apostle campus has developed to four buildings over the years with additions. The Church stands as the tallest building on the street at ~960' at the steeple. Similarly, the Gandy Dancer has had historic updates and additions to update the needs and connect the buildings. The Gandy Dancers proximity to the Huron River and Railroad sets its base at one of the lowest in the area at ~780'. The area has seen developments of new mid-rise buildings catering to the needs of the neighborhood. To conclude, the neighborhood is dynamic and full of varying buildings and buildings heights.



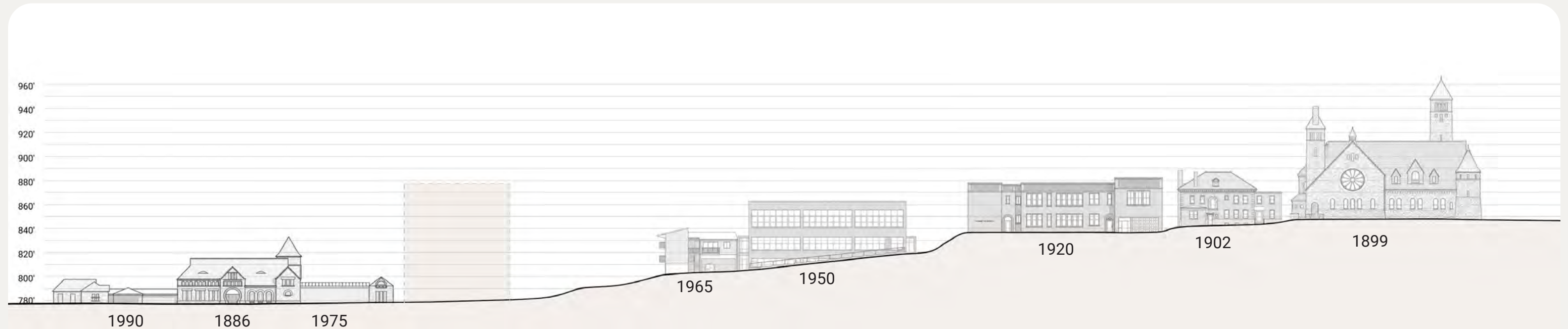
1947



1993



2025



# Neighborhood Context



# Proposed Building



# Proposed Building

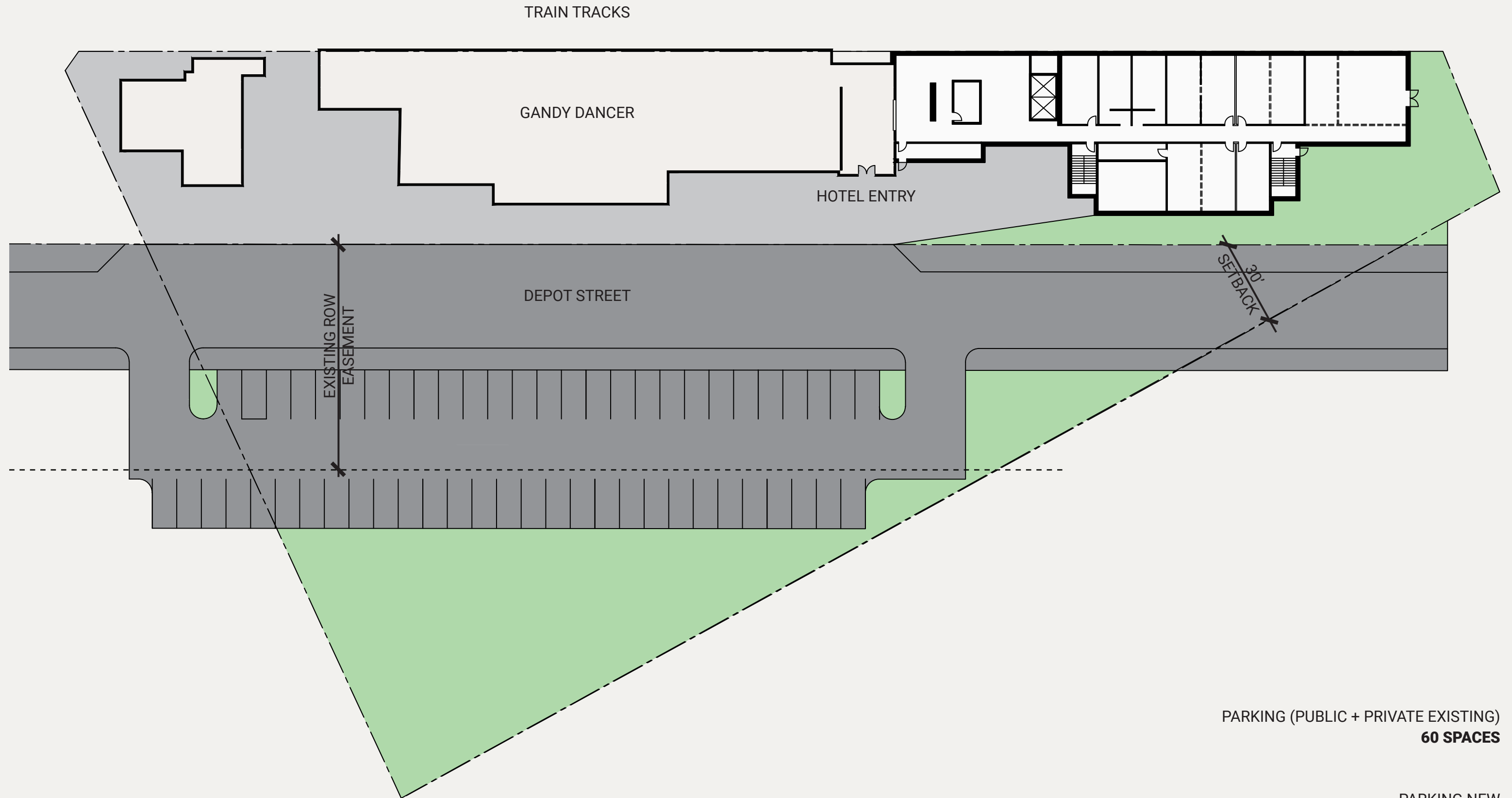


# Gandy Dancer Elevation

The building uses rough-faced granite quarried locally, accented with Lake Superior Red, Ohio Blue, and Ionia stone for trim. A slate roof with dormers crowns the structure, while stained-glass windows and terracotta fireplaces enrich the interior. Deep-set round arches frame doors and windows, complemented by asymmetrical towers and a tall chimney for a dramatic silhouette. A low metal canopy runs along the track side, linking the main building to the former baggage area. Contrasting materials like glass or dark-painted wood to preserve authenticity.



# Site plan



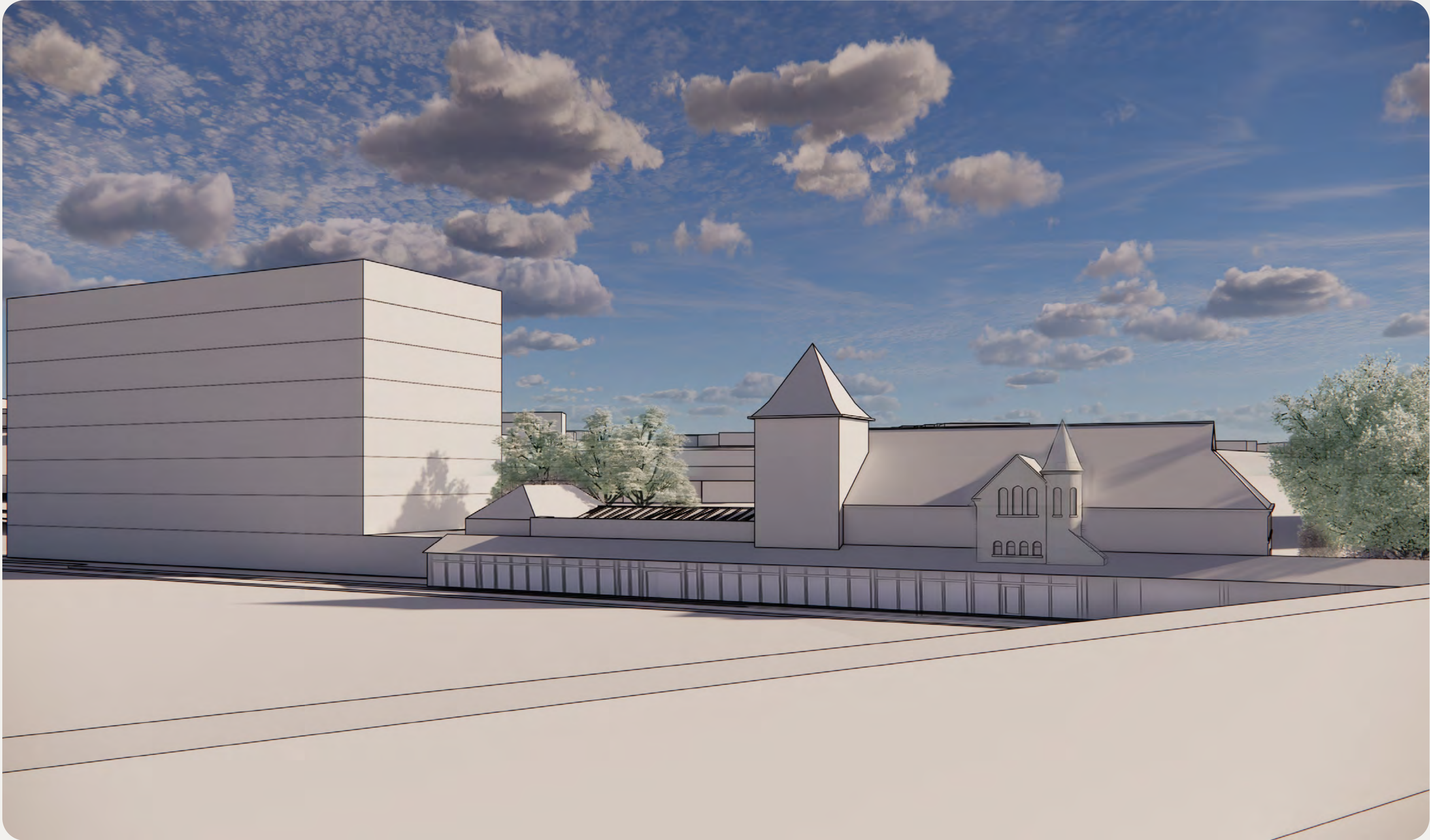
PARKING (PUBLIC + PRIVATE EXISTING)  
**60 SPACES**

PARKING NEW  
**55 SPACES**

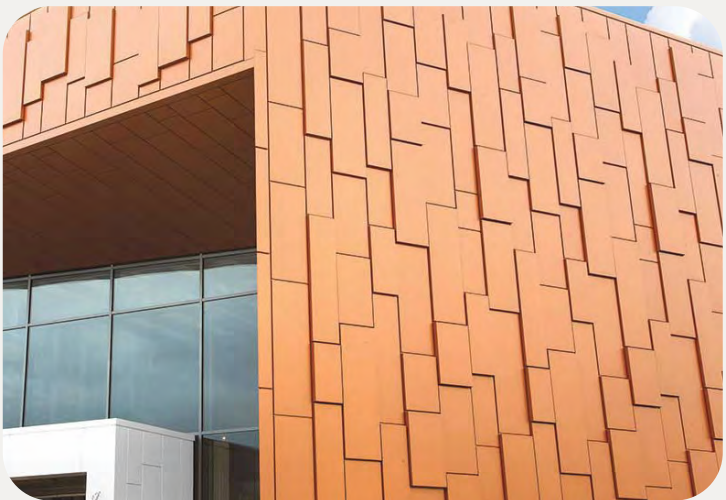
**Massing**



**Massing**



# Possible Materials



## Case Study

The Roxbury Group developed a new 11 story hotel adjacent to a historic theatre within the city of Detroit. The design was developed in accordance with Secretary of Interiors standards. The new construction was sympathetic to the historic building by use of similar materials (brick and stone) and offsetting the new building from the historic structure. The new building was reviewed and supported by the Detroit Historic District Commission.

Heights: AC Hotel: 133'  
Existing Bonstelle 83'  
Difference: 50'

