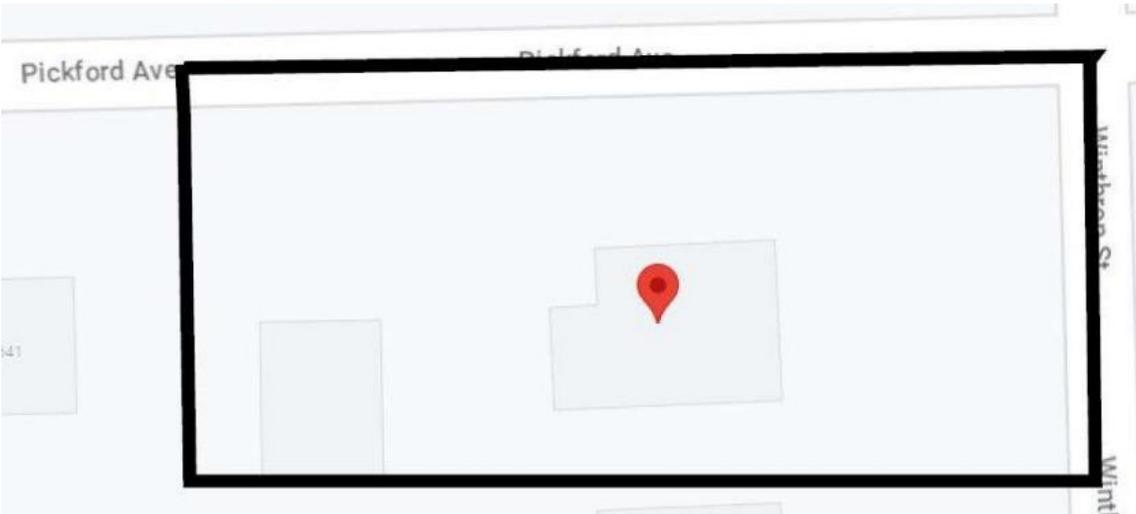


STAFF REPORT: MARCH 13, 2024, REGULAR MEETING
PREPARED BY: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT STAFF
PROPOSED DEF SOUND STUDIO HOUSE HISTORIC DISTRICT
FINAL REPORT ADOPTED BY HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD: FEBRUARY 8, 2024
DRAFT ELEMENTS OF DESIGN ADOPTED BY HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD: FEBRUARY 8, 2024



Undated Historic Designation Advisory Board photo.



Map by Historic Designation Advisory Board.

PROPOSED DISTRICT DESCRIPTION

The proposed district consists of one contributing house and one noncontributing garage at 18315 Winthrop Street along with the surrounding open space and adjacent public rights-of-way.

BACKGROUND AND CHARGE

The Historic Designation Advisory Board, which serves as Detroit’s study committee for designation of new historic districts in accordance with the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act, has been directed by the City Council to study the proposed Def Sound Studio House Historic District. Should the Council enact the proposed local historic district, both buildings in the district, as well any open spaces included within the boundaries, will

come under the Commission’s regulatory jurisdiction for any exterior changes.

The Historic District Commission, according to Sec. 21-2-56 of the Detroit City Code, “shall review” Historic Designation Advisory Board reports pertaining to proposed historic districts. The Commission’s role is advisory only. For consideration by the Commission, Planning and Development Department staff opinion follows.

RELATION TO THE DETROIT MASTER PLAN OF POLICIES

The proposed historic district would support two important goals of the Master Plan:

- Arts and Culture Policy 1.1: Promote Detroit’s history, architectural heritage, and diverse population as cultural resources and assets.
- Historic Preservation Policy 1.1: Undertake assessments to identify and protect structures with historic significance.

The proposed Def Sound Studio House Historic District is in the Greenfield area of Cluster 9. The historic district would be consistent with the following:

- Cluster 9, Greenfield, Policy 2.1: Encourage infill development in the area northeast of McNichols and the Southfield Freeway.

The vicinity of 18315 Winthrop is designated as RL: Low Density Residential in the Future General Land Use Map. The proposed historic district would not interfere with continued Low Density Residential use.

Staff concludes that the proposed historic district is consistent with the Master Plan.

PRACTICAL BUDGETARY EFFECTS ON CITY RESOURCES

As the proposed district consists of two, small buildings, and a relatively small area of adjacent land, the effect on City of Detroit resources would be negligible. Should the property owner choose to make changes to the exterior of the property, or should a City of Detroit department initiate work that would affect the property, Historic District Commission staff time would be expended in reviewing the proposed work. No other budgetary effects are likely to occur.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS FOR OWNERS, RESIDENTS, AND THE CITY

As with any historic district, there are legal implications for owners and public entities, including City of Detroit agencies. The Detroit City Code and the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act require that any “person, individual, partnership, firm, corporation, organization, institution, or agency of government” must first obtain approval from the Historic District Commission before commencing any work affecting the exterior of a property in a historic district. This includes (but is not limited to) demolition, new construction, additions, painting, siding, masonry, windows, doors, roofing, fencing, landscaping, tree removal, and paving. The Commission approves work according to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, and the Notice to Proceed criteria. Proposed work not meeting these standards, guidelines, or criteria is denied. (Detroit City Code Sec. 21-2-171, et seq., MCL 399.205 et seq.)

Property owners will also be required to perform the ongoing maintenance necessary to prevent a situation of “demolition by neglect” (Detroit City Code Sec. 21-2-59).

Residents, whether of the surrounding community or citywide, derive many tangible and intangible benefits from historic districts including fostering civic beauty, community pride, and the stabilization of property values (Detroit City Code Sec. 21-2-1). In limited cases, the property owner may be eligible for a state rehabilitation tax credit (Public Act 343 of 2020).

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL VALUES OF THE DISTRICT

The Def Sound Studio House displays the form and massing typical of the Minimal Traditional house type, also sometimes known as an FHA Small House. It is typical of other houses on its block, though it displays alterations from recent decades. The vinyl siding, vinyl windows, and steel front door clearly represent the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, coinciding with the time period when significant events described in the Final Report occurred. Designation as a historic district would potentially preserve the historical and architectural values for which the building is significant.

Although the Preliminary Report notes that Def Sound Studio and Jerry Dale were active at the property from 1983 through 2004, the report also proposes a much broader Period of Significance, from 1943 through 2004. Planning and Development Department staff offers that a narrower Period of Significance, specifically reflecting the decades when significant events in music history occurred at the house, would assist the Commission in preserving those elements of the building that reflect those significant events, while denying work that is not compatible with this significance.

PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

Planning and Development Department staff concurs that the proposed historic district would protect a historic resource and be consistent with the Master Plan of Policies.

The district map provided in the Final Report does not provide the level of precision and detail found in other designated districts. Instead of being based on a background clipped from an internet mapping service, an official boundary of a historic district should be overlaid on a measured drawing (Sanborn map, Detroit parcel map, or architectural site plan) showing exact locations of buildings, public rights-of-way, and other permanent features of historic significance. Buildings should be identified by address or other labeling. Street names should not be obscured. Maps from internet navigation services usually do not reflect actual street widths, building locations, or parcel boundaries, and we have found these types of maps to be confusing to applicants on several occasions.

PROPOSED ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Planning and Development Department staff is concerned that the draft Elements of Design do not clearly differentiate between which of the items described are character-defining features to be preserved, and which are non-historic features (that is, features from after the period of significance) that may appropriately be altered by future work.

For example, Subsection 10, "Relationship of architectural details" mentions a "former screened-in porch," and Subsection 3, "Proportion of openings," states that the porch lacks windows. If a future owner were to rehabilitate the porch, the Elements of Design would ideally provide guidance to both the owner and the Historic District Commission as to whether the porch should contain screens, or windows, or whether both would be acceptable. Alternatively, the Elements of Design could state that the porch is not a character-defining feature and its preservation is less of a concern.

A few other examples throughout the draft Elements would also benefit from additional clarity. Subsection 7, "Relationship of materials," describes a variety of materials and colors found on the building, but does not specify which are historic or character-defining and which are not historic. In the future, if damaged materials were to be replaced, or if an addition were to be constructed, or if a new building were to be built (such as a new garage), the Elements of Design should provide direction as to what materials would be appropriate and what materials would be inappropriate. Likewise, Subsection 3, "Proportion of openings within the facades," mentions vinyl windows and a front door, but does not clarify if these items relate to the historic significance of the district.