

STAFF REPORT: 9/14/22 REGULAR MEETING

PREPARED BY: T. BOSCARINO

APPLICATION NUMBER: 22-8027

ADDRESS: 2843-63 BRUSH (AKA 286 EDMUND, CITY MODERN BUILDING D3)

HISTORIC DISTRICT: BRUSH PARK

APPLICANT: CITY MODERN D3 LLC

PROPERTY OWNER: BRUSH PARK DEVELOPMENT CO PH I LLC

DATE OF PROVISIONALLY COMPLETE APPLICATION: AUGUST 22, 2022

DATE OF STAFF SITE VISIT: AUGUST 29, 2022

SCOPE: ERECT MULTI-FAMILY BUILDING

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject property consists of several parcels of vacant land that are part of a broader, multi-block infill development known as City Modern. A developer for the broader site, formerly known as Brush Park Parcel A, was selected by the Planning and Development Department through an RFP process that concluded on December 18, 2013.



Staff photo of subject property, seen from vacated alley facing northeast. August 2022.

Consisting of twelve new multi-family buildings and four rehabilitated historic homes, the design of City Modern was grounded in a 2013 survey of community preferences and a subsequent community engagement effort. The buildings of the development are architecturally distinct from one another, having been designed by different architecture firms. The twelve new buildings, as a group and covered by a single application, obtained a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic District Commission dated November 8, 2016.

The 2016 approval included six buildings of a “Carriage Homes” typology, five of which have since been constructed. However, in a cover letter attached to the current application, and in prior oral communication with PDD staff, the applicant has described changing market conditions and a demand for additional density as the impetus for a departure from the previously approved “Carriage Homes” design for Building D3. The applicant now comes to the Historic District Commission to propose a new design.

The proposed building sits not only within the context of the broader City Modern development, but the Brush Park Historic District as a whole.



View of entire block containing subject property, with footprint of proposed City Modern Building D3 in orange. Existing historic (contributing) buildings are highlighted in blue. Note that the proposed building does not front on a public right-of-way and is accessed by internal circulation through a vacated alley. Image from applicant, edited by staff.



View from vacated alley looking east, showing “Carriage Houses” typology in foreground. Parked vehicles indicate location of proposed City Modern Building D3. August 2022 photo by staff.

The proposed new building is not directly adjacent to any contributing buildings of the historic district. An appropriate design for this location would be one that adheres to the Elements of Design for the district, and is compatible with the architecture of the existing City Modern buildings.

PROPOSAL

As shown in submitted renderings and narrative, the applicant is proposing to erect one new multi-family building. The proposed building is three (3) stories tall at the north elevation and two (2) stories on the south elevation, with an area of approximately 22,800 square feet. The proposed building would be surrounded by newer construction on all sides, and will not be adjacent to any of the contributing buildings of the Brush Park Historic District. It would also be accessed by internal circulation, as the site does not have direct frontage on a public right-of-way.



Rendering of proposed development, looking southeast from interior of City Modern site. Image by applicant.

STAFF OBSERVATIONS AND RESEARCH

- The Brush Park Historic District was established by Ordinance 369-H in 1980. As described in the Final Report, the district is notable for its high-style residential architecture from the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century including numerous two-and-a-half-story houses and some taller apartment buildings, along with commercial buildings of various scales.
- The Elements of Design (Sec. 21-2-120 [c]) provide guidance for new construction in the district. Relevant items from the Elements of Design are excerpted below, abbreviated for clarity:

Height. Height varies in the district from one to 11 stories. In the area between Woodward Avenue and Brush, the original development was almost exclusively 2½ story houses. Later changes included the construction of apartment buildings among the houses, the majority of which are three stories in height. ... Later redevelopment includes apartment buildings not more than four stories

tall, most often located on Brush. In the case of the 19th Century houses located between Woodward Avenue and Brush, the 2½ story height implies more height in feet than usual, since ceiling heights in these houses are unusually high.

Proportion of building's front façade. Buildings in the district are usually taller than wide; horizontal proportions exist only in incompatible later buildings, except for row house buildings.

Proportion of openings within the façades. Areas of void generally constitute between 15 percent and 35 percent of the total façade area, excluding the roof. Proportions of the openings themselves are generally taller than wide; in some cases, vertically proportioned units are combined to fill an opening wider than tall.

Rhythm of solids to voids in front façade. Victorian structures in the district often display great freedom in the placement of openings in the façades, although older examples are generally more regular in such placement than later examples. In later apartments, openings tend to be very regular.

Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets. The area between Woodward Avenue and Brush appears to have been developed in a very regular spacing, with 50-foot lots.

Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections. Most buildings have or had a porch or entrance projection. The variety inherent in Victorian design precludes the establishment of any absolute rhythm, but such projections were often centered.

Relationship of materials. By far the most prevalent material in the district is common brick; other forms of brick, stone and wood trim are common.

Relationship of textures. The most common relationship of textures in the district is the low-relief pattern of mortar joints in brick contrasted to the smoother or rougher surfaces of stone or wood trim

Relationship of colors. Brick red predominates, both in the form of natural color brick and in the form of painted brick. Other natural brick and stone colors are also present.

Relationship of architectural detail. On the buildings of the Victorian period, elaborate detail in wood, stone, or sheet metal was common; areas treated include porches, window and door surrounds, cornices, dormers, and other areas. Later buildings are generally simpler, but include less elaborate detail in similar areas.

Relationship of roof shapes. Later apartment and commercial buildings generally have flat roofs not visible from the ground.

Walls of continuity. Between Woodward Avenue and Brush, the houses originally honored common setbacks which provided for front lawns. Some of the later apartments have not been set back to the same line as the houses amongst which they were built, thus disturbing the original line of continuity.

Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments. Individual houses have front lawns often subdivided by walks leading to the entrance. ... Side drives are rare, access to garages or coach houses being from the alleys. Some walks of stone slabs have survived; others have been replaced in concrete. Sidewalks are characteristically close to the curb.

Scale of façades and façade elements. In the large houses between John R and Brush, the scale tends to be large, and the façade elements scaled and disposed to emphasize the large size of the houses. Towers, setbacks, porches and the like divide façades into large elements. ... Later apartments are in scale with simple but large elements near the ground and repetitive window openings above, frequently capped by a substantial cornice.

Directional expression of front façades. A substantial majority of the buildings in the district have front façades vertically expressed. Exceptions are some commercial buildings on Woodward Avenue, row houses on John R or Brush, and some duplexes or row houses east of Brush.

Rhythm of building setbacks. Older houses on the east-west streets between Woodward Avenue and Brush have some setback, which varies from street to street, though generally consistent in any one block. Later apartments and commercial structures in that area often ignore the previously established setback.

Relationship of lot coverage. Older single-family houses between Woodward Avenue and Brush generally occupy about 25 to 30 percent of the building lot, not including coachhouses or garages. Later apartments and commercial buildings often fill a much higher percentage of the lot, sometimes approaching or reaching complete lot coverage.

Degree of complexity with the façades. The older houses in the district are generally characterized by a high degree of complexity within the façades, with bay windows, towers, porches, window and door hoods, elaborate cornices, and other devices used to decorate the buildings. ... Later apartments and commercial buildings tend to have more classical decorative elements of a simpler kind.

Orientation, vistas, overviews. Houses are generally oriented to the east-west streets, while apartments and commercial structures are more often oriented to the north-south streets. ... Garages and coach houses are located in the rear of residential properties and are generally oriented to the alley.

Symmetric or asymmetric appearance. In the Victorian structures, examples of both symmetric and asymmetric design occur; symmetry is more characteristic of the earlier houses, while the high Victorian examples are more likely to assemble elements in a romantic, asymmetric composition. ... Asymmetrical but balanced compositions are common. Later apartments are generally symmetrical.

General environmental character. The environmental character is of an old urban neighborhood which has undergone, and is undergoing, considerable change. The original development, reflected in the Victorian period houses, has been altered by the provision of more intensive residential development in the early 20th Century.

- Much of the Brush Park area, including the subject property, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Woodward East/Piety Hill district. The 1973 registration form for the National Register district states that the area originally included “large single-family detached brick Victorian houses on lots 50 feet wide and 150 feet deep. The houses all faced the street and were set back uniformly from the sidewalk about 25 feet. All houses had large front porches which were roofed. ... Horses and carriages were quartered in brick carriage houses which were located on the rear of the lot and were accessible from 20 foot unpaved alleys.” According to the 1973 National Register nomination, “the brick, stone, and millwork on the exteriors were of a very ornate and complex nature which demonstrate high quality and skill of craftsmanship.”

- The proposed development is responsive to the Elements of Design in most ways. Pages 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 of the attached *286 Edmund Place: Historic District Commission Presentation* highlight efforts made to adhere to the Elements of Design. The use of arches, niches, coursed brickwork, and textured relief borrows elements from the historic architecture of the district. The color and scale of the building is also appropriate, especially when compared with larger historic apartment buildings elsewhere in the district. Façade elements such as arches, windows, and textured metal add a vertical emphasis to what is otherwise a horizontal building. The flat roof and recessed porches have precedent elsewhere in the district.



Image from application showing historic design inspiration. Above: East elevation of Building D3. Below, historic buildings on John R in Brush Park. Rendering and photographs by applicant.

- The proposed building differentiates itself with its contemporary design, without including elements that are obviously out of character with the district. Particularly relevant in this case is the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation #9, which directs:

New additions, exterior alterations, or related new construction ... 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.

Staff feels that the proposed new construction strikes an appropriate balance between differentiation and compatibility.

- The subject property is subject to a development agreement that requires additional design review by the Planning and Development Department. This review is ongoing. PDD comments dated August 1, 2022 are attached for the Commission’s reference.

ISSUES

- A few items from the Elements of Design are not closely adhered to by the proposed development. Specifically, regarding overall massing and scale, *rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets* states “the area between Woodward Avenue and Brush appears to have been developed in a very regular spacing, with 50-foot lots,” and *walls of continuity* elaborates “the houses [between Woodward and Brush] originally honored common setbacks which provided for front lawns. *Rhythm of building setbacks* and *relationship of lot coverage* observe, respectively, “houses on the east-west streets between Woodward Avenue and Brush have some setback” and they “generally occupy about 25 to 30 percent of the building lot.” *Orientation, vistas, overviews* concludes “houses are generally oriented to the east-west streets, while apartments and commercial structures are more often oriented to the north-south streets.”
- Regarding the appearance of the façade, *rhythm of solids to voids* states “in later apartments, openings tend to be very regular” and *scale of façades and façade elements* calls for “large elements near the ground and repetitive window openings above.”
- PDD staff, in its August 1, 2022 design review comments (mentioned above), encouraged the applicant to improve “the building’s relationship with the ground” and add “a higher level of articulation” to the façade. This direction is consistent with the Elements of Design referenced above.
- However, staff suggests that compatibility with the previously approved and completed City Modern buildings, which surround the subject property on all sides, is of paramount importance. Design elements including massing and scale, the rhythm and placement of fenestration, and the scale of façade elements (particularly at the base of the building), though a moderate departure from the Elements of Design, are entirely consistent with the other, existing, buildings on the block. Further, the design of the proposed City Modern Building D3 employs a number of design features, described above, which give it a level of appropriateness *beyond* that of the other, existing, City Modern buildings.

RECOMMENDATION

Section 21-2-78, Determination of Historic District Commission

Staff recommends that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for the work as proposed, as the work meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and adheres to the Elements of Design for the Brush Park Historic District.