

# City of Detroit

## CITY COUNCIL

### HISTORIC DESIGNATION ADVISORY BOARD

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#### **HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL:**

**RE: Receive and file - for the boundary correction for the Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center local historic district, located at 657 Brewster Street, Detroit, MI**

This request is for your Honorable Body to receive and file the boundary correction for the Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center local historic district (Ord. No. 18-15, effective June 10, 2015).

The revised and corrected boundary for the Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center Historic District has been approved by the Historic Designation Advisory Board, and the Engineering and Legal Departments.

Staff is available to answer any questions and/or concerns you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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Historic Designation Advisory Board  
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## Brewster Wheeler Boundary Corrections – Ordinance Amendment (10/2024)

### Sec. 21-2-229. - Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center Historic District.

- (a) An historic district to be known as the Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center Historic District is established in accordance with the provisions of this article.
- (b) This historic district designation is hereby certified as being consistent with the Detroit Master Plan of Policies.
- (c) The boundaries of the Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center Historic District, as shown on the map on file in the Office of the City Clerk, are as follows:

On the east, the center line of the southbound service drive of the Walter P. Chrysler Freeway; on the south, the center line of vacated Brewster Street, as extended; on the west, the center line of the vacated alley, as extended, running east-west north-south between Wilkins Street and Brewster Street St. Antoine and the southbound service drive of the Walter P. Chrysler Freeway; and on the north, the center line of Wilkins Street.

- (d) The elements of design, as defined in [Section 21-2-2](#) of this Code, shall be as follows:

(1) *Height.* The single building rises in height from west to east, and its articulation varies: the original, 1917 Section is a single story in height with a tall, attic story; the central block of the 1929 Addition is two stories in height with a flat roof; and the eastern portion of the 1929 Addition is a single, tall story, rising several feet above the remainder of the building.

(2) *Proportion of building's front façade.* The front façade is wider than tall. The building is articulated into three sections, each of which are wider than tall.

(3) *Proportion of openings within the façade.* All façades of the original, 1917 Section are composed of approximately 30 percent openings, all windows filled in with brick; round-arched windows formerly contained fanlights. All façades of the 1929 Addition are composed of approximately 25 percent openings.

(4) *Rhythm of solids to voids in the front façade.* Although the building is asymmetrical in character, rhythm of solids to voids is regular throughout. On the 1917 Section, the front and rear (south and north) façades consist of five bays; the side façade is two bays deep. Entrances are centered on the façade of the 1917 Section and the central block of the 1929 Addition; these entrances are flanked by sidelights. Openings are arranged one over another by floor, including basement windows and a small attic window on the westernmost bay of the tallest section of

the building. The front and rear (south and north) façade of the 1929 Addition are asymmetrical, and are ten bays wide. The east façade is five bays deep.

(5) *Rhythm of spacing of buildings on streets.* This district contains one single building, surrounded on all sides by open space.

(6) *Rhythm of entrance and/or porch projections.* The building contains a single porch projection, centered on the façade of the original, 1917 Section. A flat stone porch extends out from the façade and is supported by two stone posts. A secondary entrance on the rear (north) of the 1929 Addition is accessible by a metal fire escape.

(7) *Relationship of materials.* All façades are clad in a brick veneer. Shingles on the 1917 Section are asphalt. A raised concrete foundation is visible on the entire building. A water table and string courses are stone. The flat roof has a stone coping. Windows, when extant, are metal; consisting of divided lights in fixed sashes with operable hoppers. Windows have cast stone sills and brick lintels. A paneled wood double door remains on the 1917 Section.

(8) *Relationship of textures.* Overall, the building is smooth in texture, with smooth, American bond brick and mortar joints highlighted with smooth stone detail. By contrast the trim surrounding the entrance to the 1929 Addition is rich in carved stone ornament. The 1917 Section is somewhat more varied in texture, with English cross-bond brickwork; window openings are framed in decorative brick, and a series of diamond-shaped medallions runs along the cornice of the section.

(9) *Relationship of colors.* The primary relationship of color is that of red brick contrasted with lighter stone trim. Windows are steel and dark. Asphalt shingles are black.

(10) *Relationship of architectural details.* An entrance, centered on the front (south) façade of the 1917 Section, projects from the building and is framed with stone pilasters and is topped with a stone elliptical hood with cornice returns; a denticulate cornice runs along the hood and along the sides of the entrance. A porch cornice is also denticulate. The 1929 Addition exhibits elements of classical, Art Deco and Jacobethan styles, with cast stone and trim details, including decorative stonework which caps brick pilasters and extends above the roofline. The primary entrance to the 1929 Addition features the greatest detail, with a surround containing rinceau, rosettes, and an egg and dart pattern under a door entablature; a cornice projects slightly above the doorway, above which is a stone panel inscribed "CENTRAL COMMUNITY CENTER," surmounted by a carved wood

panel reading "WHEELER." The entablature above this entrance includes a denticulate cornice and a large, centered, circular stone. A secondary entrance, centered on the front (south) façade of the 1929 Addition, is completely enclosed and has a simple stone surround. The east façade features a string course of soldier-bond brick. The entablature of the 1929 Addition also features symmetrically-placed circular stones.

(11) *Relationship of roof shapes.* The original, 1917 Section bears a broad, hip roof, contrasting with a flat roof on the 1929 Addition. An exterior chimney on the northwest of the building projects slightly above the roofline. An interior chimney also pierces the roof on the 1929 Addition. On the 1917 Section, two circular roof vents are visible, but a skylight has been enclosed. On the central block, clerestory windows are recessed from the façade.

(12) *Walls of continuity.* As the single building is surrounded by open space, no wall of continuity exists within the broader district. Although the 1929 Section of the building features no setback, the front (south) façade of the 1917 Section is set back from Brewster Street; a porch projection extending forward to Brewster Street, creates a wall of continuity.

(13) *Relationship of significant landscape features and surface treatments.* The open space is not generally landscaped, although concrete sidewalks extend around the building as well as around the perimeter of the site; wood light poles and athletic fixtures also exist although the latter are in disrepair.

(14) *Relationship of open space to structures.* The building is surrounded on all sides by open space.

(15) *Scale of façade and façade elements.* Façade elements are generally large, creating an imposing structure with details that are clearly visible from a distance. More pedestrian-scale details are centered around the two primary entrances, one on the 1917 Section, and one on the 1929 Section of the building.

(16) *Directional expression of front elevation.* The front elevation of the building is vertical in expression due to a high foundation, tall window openings, and tall brick pilasters capped by stone ornamentation. A horizontal contrast is provided by string courses.

(17) *Rhythm of building setbacks.* The 1929 Section of the building features no setback from the public right-of-way, fronting onto a sidewalk that runs alongside a truncated Brewster Street. On the 1917 Section, a setback is adequate to house a projecting front porch.

(18) *Relationship of lot coverage.* The building occupies approximately one-third of its lot, with a paved parking area to the east of the building, and a grassy lawn with several mature trees to the north of the building.

(19) *Degree of complexity within the façade.* The degree of complexity is low due to a simple articulation of rectangular or arched window openings separated by brick pilasters. The roofline, with a hip roof on the 1917 Section and a flat roof on the 1929 Section, is also simple in nature. A somewhat increased degree of complexity is added by stone trim at the parapet wall of the 1929 Section, and decorative stonework surrounding the central entrance.

(20) *Orientation, vistas, overviews.* The building is oriented toward the south with its primary entrances opening onto Brewster Street, which approaches the site from the east and dead-ends at the building. The grade is flat and open space exists for some distance in all directions.

(21) *Symmetric or asymmetric appearance.* The building is asymmetrical in appearance, due to its original section being expanded to the east with a two-story central block and a somewhat taller, though single-story, eastern section. Viewed from the east and west sides, the building has a symmetrical appearance.

(22) *General environmental character.* The district consists of one building, formerly associated with the Brewster and Frederick Douglass Apartments. Due to the demolition of these buildings, the district is now surrounded by vast open space, especially to the south and east. To the east is the Walter P. Chrysler Freeway, and to the north is multi-family housing. As Wilkins Street is one of the few streets that cross the freeway in the area, the district is visible to through traffic.



Brewster-Wheeler Recreation Center  
Historic District boundary map  
657 Brewster Street  
Detroit, Wayne County